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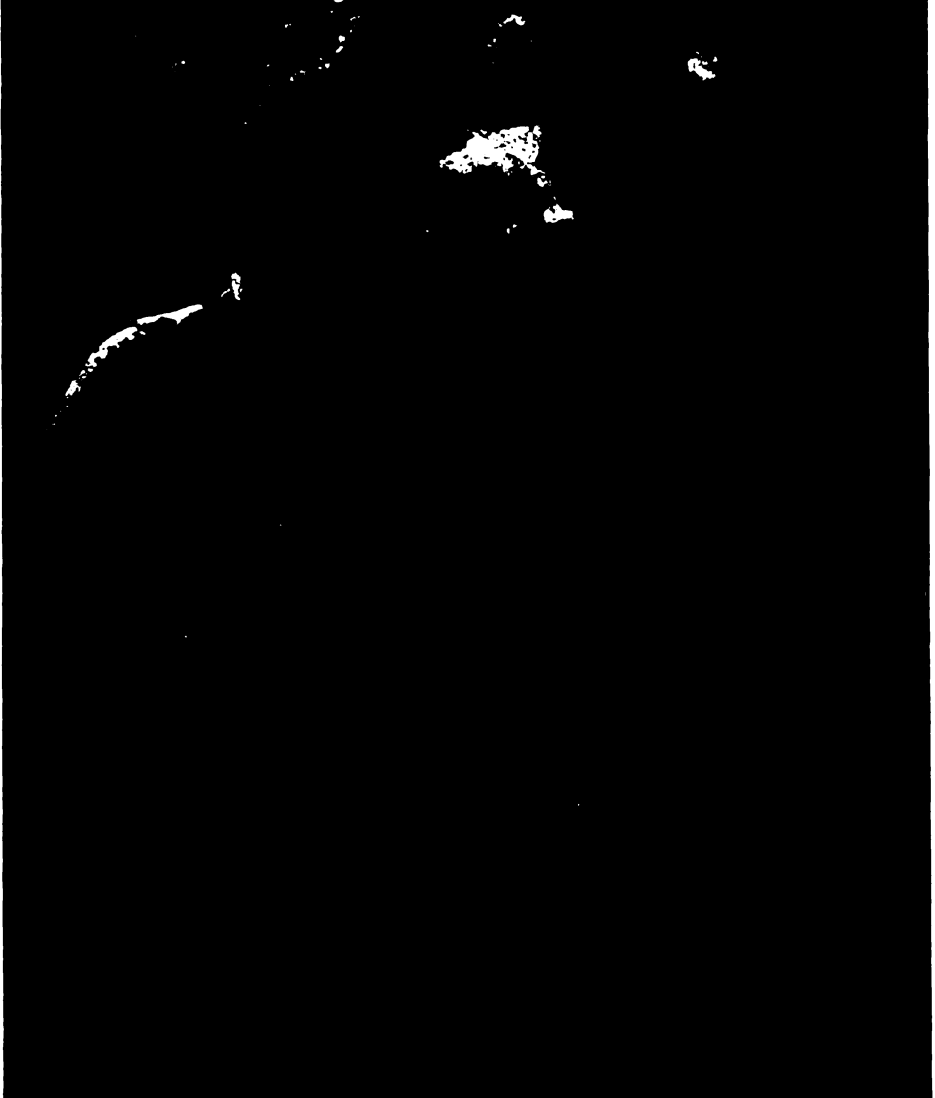

Miss Gibbie Gault

Kate Langley Bosher

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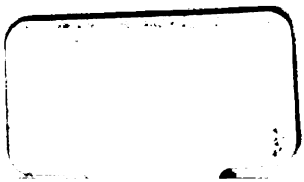

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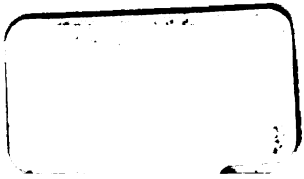

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THE RUSTLE OF SKIRTS MADE HER LOOK UP

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MISS GIBBIE GAULT

BY KATE LANGLEY BOSHER

Author of "Mary Cary," etc.

WITH FRONTISPIECE
BY HARRIET ROOSEVELT RICHARDS

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TO
MY HUSBAND

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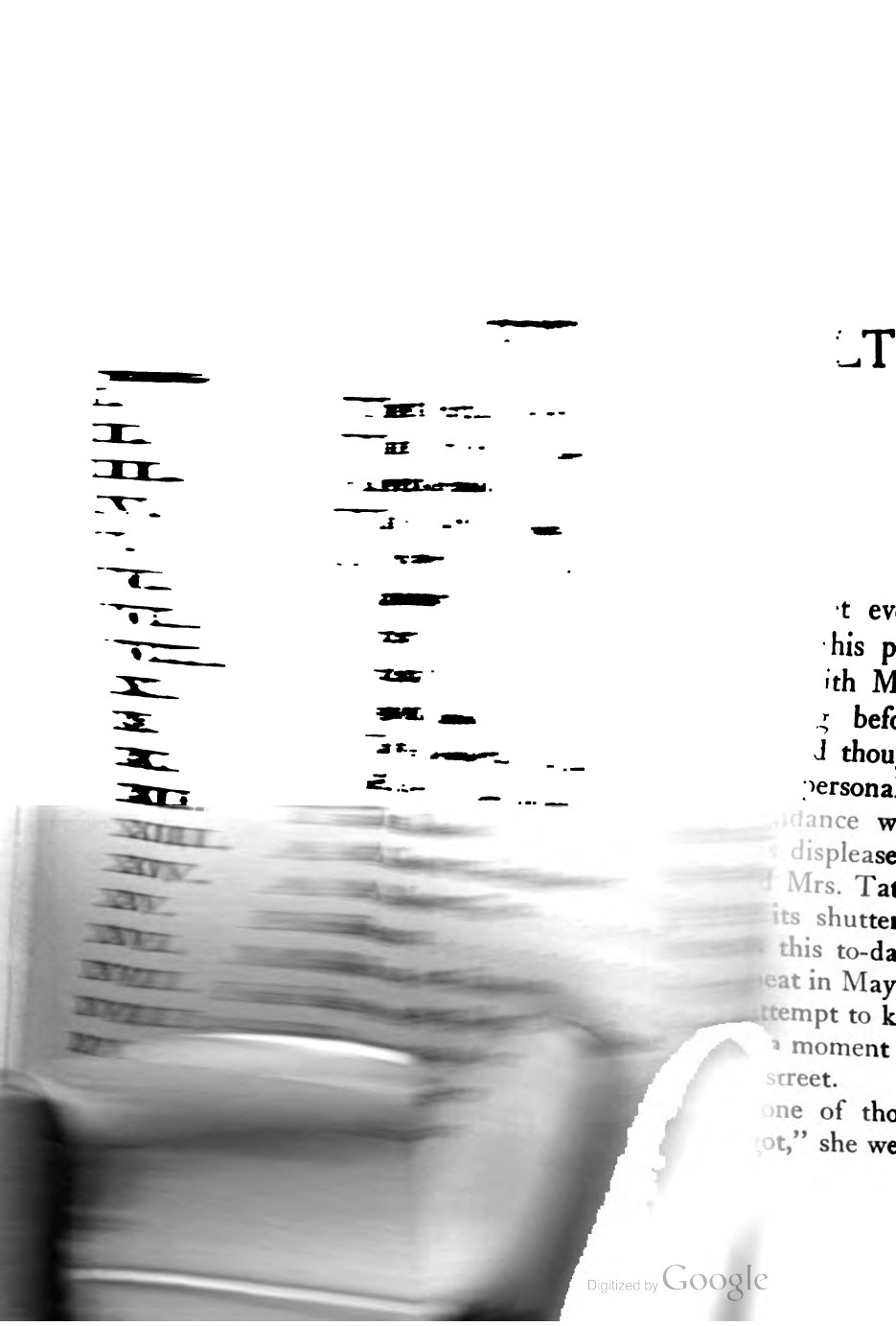

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MISS GIBBIE GAULT

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MISS GIBBIE GAULT

I

THE GUILD OF GOSSIPS

THE Needlework Guild, which met every Thursday at eleven o'clock, on this particular Thursday was meeting with Mrs. Tate. It was the last meeting before adjournment for the summer, and though Mrs. Pryor, the president, had personally requested a large attendance, the attendance was small. In consequence, Mrs. Pryor was displeased.

"Mercy, but it's warm in here," said Mrs. Tate, going to a window and opening wide its shutters. "I had no idea it would be as hot as this to-day, though you can nearly always look for heat in May." She slapped her hands together in an attempt to kill a fly that was following her, then stood a moment at the window looking up and down the street.

"Wish to goodness I could have one of those electric fans like Miss Gibbie Gault's got," she went

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on, coming back to her seat and wiping her face with Mrs. Webb's handkerchief, which happened to be closest to her; "but wishing and getting are not on speaking terms in our house. Have any of you seen Miss Gibbie's new hat?"

"I have." Mrs. Moon took up the large braid-bound palm-leaf fan lying on the chair next to her and began to use it in leisurely, rhythmic strokes. "She has five others exactly like it. She says she would have ordered ten, but when a person has passed the sixty-fifth birthday the chances are against ten being used, and six years ahead are sufficient provision for hats. Five of them are put away in camphor."

"Imagine ordering hats for years ahead just to save trouble! I'm thankful to have one for immediate use." Mrs. Corbin put down the work on which she had not been sewing and folded her arms. "Miss Gibbie may be queer, but there's a lot of sense in deciding on a certain style and sticking to it. Fashions come and fashions go, but never is she bothered. Just think of the peace of mind sacrificed to clothes!"

"Who but Miss Gibbie would wear the same kind year after year, year after year?" said Mrs. Pryor, who alone was industriously sewing. "But that's Gibbie Gault. From the time she was born she has snapped her fingers at other people, and, if it's possible to do a thing differently from the way others do it, she will do it that way or—"

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"Make them do it. I never will forget the day she marched Beth's boys through the streets and locked them up in her house." Mrs. Tate pointed her needle, which had been unthreaded all the morning, at Mrs. Moon. "Funniest thing I ever saw. Remember it, Beth?"

"Remember? I should think I did." Mrs. Moon smiled quietly. "I have long seen the funny side, but it took me long to see it. Nobody but Miss Gibbie would have done it."

"Please tell me about it, Mrs. Moon," said Mrs. Burnham, who was still something of a stranger in Yorkburg. "Every now and then I hear references to Miss Gibbie Gault's graveyard, and to the way she once got ahead of your boys, and I've often wanted to ask about it. Is there really a graveyard at Tree Hill, and is the gate bricked up so that no one can get in?"

"It certainly is." Mrs. Moon laughed. There isn't very much to tell. Everybody knows about the old Bloodgood graveyard at Tree Hill in which Miss Gibbie's parents and grandparents and great-grandparents are buried. Her mother was a Bloodgood; and everybody knows, also, that since the Yankee soldier, who died during the war at Judge Gault's house, was buried there the gate has been bricked up and nobody has ever been inside but Miss Gibbie and Jackson who cuts the grass."

"But how does she get in?" Mrs. Burnham's

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voice was puzzled inquiry. "If there's no gate, how—"

"She climbs up a ladder on the outside of the wall, which is eight feet high and two feet thick, and down another which is inside," interrupted Mrs. Tate, to whom the question had not been asked. "I wish to goodness I had been there the day she nabbed your boys, Beth. I don't wonder they were scared."

"They were certainly scared." Mrs. Moon wiped her lips and smiled reminiscently. "My boys followed her one day, Mrs. Burnham, and the result was one of the most ridiculous sights ever seen in Yorkburg.

"After finishing what she had to do that day, Miss Gibbie climbed up the ladder she keeps inside and started to get on the one outside, and there was none to get on. The boys had taken her ladder and hidden it, and they themselves were hiding behind an oak-tree some little distance off.

"At first they doubled up with laughter when they saw Miss Gibbie straddling the top of the wall, unable to get down either way; but suddenly, Richard said, she balanced herself on the top of the wall and sat there with her feet hanging over as if going to spend the day, and then in a flash she was down on the ground.

"Half a minute later she had each of them by the arm. Dick said his feet were dead feet, he couldn't

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budge. Neither could Frederick. The sudden jump had paralyzed them.

"'Moon boys!' she said—'Moon boys! Fine fun, wasn't it? Well, let's go home and have some more fun,' and down the hill she marched them and on into town. All the length of King Street they went, then into St. Mary's Road, then Fitzhugh Street, and back into King, and finally into her home in Pelham Place.

"All the time nothing had been said. Everybody who had seen them had stopped and stared, and some of the boys had started to follow, but Miss Gibbie had nodded her head backward, and a nod was enough. When they got in the house she took them up-stairs to a big bedroom and told them to sit down and cool off; then she locked the door and left them.

"Five hours later the door was opened and dinner was brought in. It was a good dinner, and the boys ate it, every bit of it, and, feeling better, were beginning to look around for means of escape, when in walked Miss Gibbie with two white things in her hand.

"'Didn't we have lots of fun this morning?' she said. 'Awful lot of fun to see a lady play Humpty-Dumpty. Pity nobody else could see. When people look funny everybody ought to see.' And Frederick said, as she didn't seem mad a bit, he thought she was going to tell them to run on home, when she turned to the dining-room servant, who had come in with

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her, and flung out two big old-fashioned nightgowns of her own. 'Here, Hampton, help these boys take off their hot clothes and put on something cool,' she said, and she made Hampton undress them and put on her gowns, and then sent them flying home."

Miss Matoaca Brockenborough threw back her head and laughed heartily. "I can see them now, as they came running down the street. They were trying to hold their white robes up in front, but behind they were trailing in the dust, and following them were boys and dogs and goats and girls, and I stood still, like all the other grown people, to see what was the matter. I laughed till I cried. Frederick stumbled at every other step, and Dick got his feet so tangled that he fell flat twice. If old Admiral Bloodgood's ghost had been chasing them, they couldn't have run faster. Nobody but Miss Gibbie would have dressed them up that way."

"And nobody but Miss Gibbie would have come back at me as she did when I told her how uneasy I had been by the boys' absence at dinner," said Mrs. Moon, who had moved nearer the window. "It was twelve years ago, but I have never forgotten what she said or the way she said it. I can see her now." Mrs. Moon sat upright. "'My dear Madam,' she said, 'my dear Madam, you will have cause not only for uneasiness, but for shame and sorrow, if you don't let your boys understand early

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in life that disrespect to ladies means disaster later on.'"

"That's true; but a lot of true things aren't nice to have on your mind. Don't you all think it's awful hot in here? I do," and again Mrs. Tate got up and walked across the room, this time throwing wide the shutters and letting in a glare of sunshine. "If I'd known it was going to be as warm as this I would have made some lemonade. There goes Mary Cary!" and, looking up, the ladies saw her smile and nod and shake her fan at some one who was passing.

"Is she riding?" asked Mrs. Webb, threading the needle held closely to her eyes—"or walking?"

"Riding, and without a piece of hat. That little Peggy McDougal is with her, holding a green parasol over both."

"Mary Cary will ruin that child," said Mrs. Pryor. "She is constantly taking her about and giving her things. But Mary, of course, does as she pleases. She always has and always will."

"She pleases a lot of people besides herself, and I always did say if you could do that you certainly ought to, for there are so few that can. But I don't think Mary gives herself a thought. Did you all know the night-school teacher is going to leave?" and Mrs. Tate put down her fan long enough to again wipe her face with Mrs. Webb's handkerchief. "Mary is so sorry about it, but, of course, she can't help it."

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"I believe she can help it." Mrs. Pryor looked around the room as if for confirmation. "Everybody knows the reason he's going. I believe any girl can keep a man from falling in love with her if she wants to. The trouble with Mary is she doesn't want to. There are my girls. You don't catch them encouraging attentions they don't want."

Mrs. Moon's foot pressed Mrs. Corbin's. Miss Matoaca Brockenborough's elbow nudged Mrs. Tazewell, but no one spoke, and Mrs. Pryor went on: "But Mary Cary has been a law unto herself from childhood, and, now she is back in Yorkburg, she thinks she can keep it up, can live her life independently of others, can do her own way, come and go as she pleases, and not be criticised. Yorkburg isn't used to having a young woman live in a house alone, except for a white servant whom nobody knows anything about."

"She's got three servants," chimed Mrs. Tate. "Ephraim and Kezia both live with her."

"I wasn't speaking of colored servants." Again Mrs. Pryor waved her fan as if for silence. "Besides, they have their quarters outside, and both are old. Out West people may do the things she is doing, but in Virginia we are different. We—"

"Oh, we're nothing of the kind, Lizzie," and Mrs. Webb laid her sewing in her lap. "Yorkburg is like all the rest of the world, as we would know if we went about more. The trouble is, we think we are the world."

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"I don't see why Mary Cary shouldn't live in the way she wants to," said Mrs. Corbin. "We live to suit ourselves, and why shouldn't she? Heaven knows she's done enough for Yorkburg since she came back. I think she was mighty good to come and live in a quiet little town like this, when she could live almost anywhere she wants. And think of the money she spends here!"

"That is just it! Where does all that money come from? Only yesterday she chartered the *General Maury* to take the orphan children on an all-day picnic to Wayne Beach on the fourteenth of this month, and all at her expense. It takes money to do things of this kind. She says she is not rich. Where does the money come from?"

Mrs. Pryor tapped the table on which her hands had rested and looked around with an answer-that-now-if-you-can air, and several started to answer. Mrs. Burnham's voice was clearest, however, and as she spoke those in front turned to hear her.

"We don't know where it comes from," she said, courageously, though her face flushed, "and I am not sure that it is required of us to know. If Miss Cary prefers not to discuss her money matters, we have no right to inquire into them. I have not been here very long, and I don't know Yorkburg as well as the people who were born here, but if more of us took interest in the things she—"

"In Yorkburg, Mrs. Burnham, women are not sup-

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posed to take interest in what are conceded to be the affairs of men."

Mrs. Pryor was withering in her disapproval, and this time Mrs. Corbin touched Miss Matoaca's foot. "I suppose you allude to the streets of Yorkburg, the schools, and library—and some other things. All these Western and Northern ideas which Mary Cary has brought back are very distasteful to the Virginians of historic ancestry. We have gotten on very well for many centuries without women meddling in men's matters. I have good authority for what I say. It is unscriptural. St. Paul says, let the women keep silent and learn of their husbands at home!"

The door behind Mrs. Pryor's back had opened while she was talking, and Miss Gibbie Gault, listening with her hand on the knob, tilted her chin and screwed up her left eye so tightly that it seemed but a little round hole, and at sight of it some of the ladies brightened visibly, while others fidgeted in nervous apprehension of what might come.

Miss Gibbie came farther in the room, laid her bag and turkey-wing fan on the table over which Mrs. Pryor was presiding, and, without a good-morning to the others, took her seat and began the pulling-off of her white cotton gloves.

"What's all this nonsense about St. Paul and women, Lizzie?" she began, laying the gloves by the bag and taking up the fan. "I heard that last re-

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mark, but Mr. Pryor didn't. Do you ever tell Mr. Pryor about St. Paul's opinions? I hope, some of these eternal times, I am going to know St. Paul. His epistles don't speak of a wife, but I've always imagined he had one, and of the kind who didn't agree with you, Lizzie, that women should keep silent and learn of their husbands at home—like you learn of yours."

The white ribbon strings which tied Miss Gibbie's broad-brimmed white straw hat under her chin were unfastened and thrown back over her shoulders, the sprig muslin skirt was spread out carefully, and the turkey-wing fan lifted from her lap, but for a moment Mrs. Pryor did not speak.

Her face, not given to flushing, had colored at Miss Gibbie's words. She pressed her lips firmly together and looked around the room as if asking for Christian forbearance for so irreverent a speech as had just been heard; then she rose.

"I do not care to discuss St. Paul. When a woman sits in judgment upon one of the disciples of the Lord—"

"Don't get your Biblical history mixed, Lizzie. St. Paul was not one of the twelve. He was an apostle, a writer of epistles. I admire him, but, from his assertions concerning women, he must have had some in his family who gave him trouble. Whenever you hear a man in public insisting on keeping women in their place, keeping them down and un-

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der, not letting them do this or letting them do that, you may be certain he is a managed man. But if you won't discuss St. Paul with a sinner such as I, we will go back to the person you were discussing, and I will discuss her with Christians such as you. Who was it? If it wasn't Mary Cary I will give ten dollars to your heathen fund." She looked around the room and then at Mrs. Webb. "Was it Mary Cary, Virginia?"

Mrs. Webb, biting a strand of cotton held at arm's-length from the spool, nodded, then threaded her needle.

"Yes, we were talking about her work here in Yorkburg, and Mrs. Pryor was telling us she had engaged the *General Maury* to take the orphan children to Wayne Beach on the fourteenth, and—"

"Lizzie wanted to know where the money was coming from? For a Christian woman, Lizzie, your curiosity in money matters is unrighteous. If money is honestly come by, what business is it of ours how it is spent?"

"Why doesn't she tell how it is come by?" Mrs. Pryor's voice was high and sharp. "Mary Cary has been back in Yorkburg seven months—"

"Seven months and two weeks," corrected Mrs. Tate, pointing her unthreaded needle at Mrs. Pryor.

"She was a penniless orphan until thirteen"—the interruption was ignored—"and, so far as we've

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heard, she has never had a fortune left her, and yet after nine years' absence she comes back, has a beautiful home, a horse, and a runabout, keeps three servants, gives to everything, spends freely, and never tells how she gets the money."

"And that's something good people will never forgive, will they, Lizzie?"

Miss Gibbie Gault leaned forward and tapped the table on which Mrs. Pryor's hands were resting with the tip of the turkey-wing fan. "Though one feeds the hungry and clothes the naked, brings cleanliness out of dirt, and gladness where was dulness, makes flowers grow where were weeds, it profiteth nothing —if one's business is not told. Be honest, Lizzie. Isn't that so?"

Mrs. Moon glanced anxiously at the clock on the mantel just under the portrait of Mrs. Tate's great-grandfather, and hurriedly folded her work. She never came to a meeting of the Needlework Guild if she thought it likely Miss Gibbie would be there. But Miss Gibbie was even less regular than Miss Honoria Brockenborough, and her attendance to-day was evidently for a purpose. By herself Miss Gibbie was an Occasion, a visit to her was an experience that gave color and life to the dullest of days, and she did not deny her enjoyment of Miss Gibbie's comments on people and things. But Mrs. Pryor and Miss Gibbie together made an atmosphere too electrical for her peace-loving nature, and she was wondering

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if it were possible to get away when the door opened and Mrs. Tate's maid put her head inside.

"Mis' Pryor," she said, and her eyes seemed all whites, "somebody at the telephone say for you to come on home; that Mr. Pryor done took sick on the street and they've brung him in. Miss Lizzie Bettie say to come on quick."

Every woman turned in her seat. From some came exclamations of frightened sympathy. From others a movement to rise, as if the summons had come to them, but Mrs. Pryor waved them back.

"I don't think it is anything serious," she said, bluntly. "I can't even go to a meeting in peace. Lizzie Bettie is so excitable. Mr. Pryor has been having attacks of indigestion for months. He ate sausage this morning for breakfast. He knows he can't eat sausage."

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II

THE VIEWS OF MISS GIBBIE

MISS GIBBIE'S carriage was at the gate, and before the others knew what to say she conducted Mrs. Pryor out of the room, put her in the carriage herself, and gave the order to Jackson to drive her home. "Tell Maria to telephone me here in half an hour how William is," she called, "and if you need me let me know," then went back into the house where all were talking at once.

"Do you reckon he is really ill, Miss Gibbie?" asked Miss Matoaca Brockenborough. "Don't you think some of us ought to have gone with her?"

"Do you suppose they have gotten the doctor?" inquired Mrs. Webb, and "he's so uncomplaining they might not know he was ill," said Mrs. Moon, while Mrs. Tazewell, full of sympathy, thought they ought to adjourn and go see if there was not something they could do.

"Which of those questions do you want me to answer first?" Miss Gibbie, taking Mrs. Pryor's chair, waved the turkey-wing fan back and forth, but with

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fingers not so firm as they had been before the message came, and as she spoke the room became quiet again.

"Do I hope William Pryor is seriously ill?" she began, her keen gray eyes dim with something rarely seen in them. "Do I hope William is going to die? I do. For thirty-nine years he has been the husband of Lizzie Pryor, and he has earned his reward. I don't believe in a golden-harp heaven. Not being musical, William and I wouldn't know what to do with a harp. I believe in a heaven where we get away from some people and get back to others, and God knows I hope William will have a little respite before Lizzie joins him."

"I don't know Mr. Pryor very well," said Mrs. Brent, who had moved closer to the table in the general uprising due to Mrs. Pryor's departure, "but I've always felt sorry for him somehow. He had such a patient, frightened face, and was so polite."

"That was what ruined him." Miss Gibbie's voice was steady again. "Many wives are ruined by over-politeness. They take advantage of it, and make their husbands spend their lives in an eternal effort to please. That's what poor William was forever attempting to do, and never succeeding. He was Apology in the flesh. No matter what he did in the morning he had to explain it at night."

"He had to," broke in Mrs. Tate, who still held her needle between finger and thumb. "If he didn't,

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Mrs. Pryor breathed so through her nose you couldn't stay in the house with her. I was there once when she wanted to go to her sister's in Washington to get new dresses for Maria and Anna Belle and Sue, and Mr. Pryor had ventured to say he didn't have the money. You ought to have seen her! She hardly spoke to me, and Louisa told me afterward they didn't see her teeth for a week, she kept her lips down on them so tight. Poor Mr. Pryor, I saw him a day or two afterward on his way home to dinner, and he looked like he would rather go to—"

"Hell. Speak out. I would, had I been he." Miss Gibbie blew her nose, put the handkerchief back in the bag hanging from her belt, took out her spectacles and laid them on the table. "Any kind of woman can be endured better than a sulking woman. She's worse than a nagger, and home is a place of perdition with that kind in it. But in a sense William deserved what he got. He let her marry him."

"Oh, she didn't ask him!" Mrs. Burnham was from the North, and her voice was astonished interrogation. "Surely she didn't ask him!"

"No. She made him ask her. Made him feel so sorry for her, cried over herself and her loneliness so persistently that William, being a man, walked in. Six weeks later they were married."

"I wonder if it was really true the way they say

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she used to do," and Mrs. Tate, whose needle was now lost, was again fanning vigorously.

"What way?" Miss Gibbie turned so quickly toward her that Mrs. Tate jumped.

"Why, I heard when she was first married that if she couldn't have just what she wanted, or if Mr. Pryor did anything she didn't like, she would lie flat down on her back and kick her heels on the floor so loud you could hear it all over the house. I don't believe it was true."

"You don't? Well, it was, with this difference. When she wanted a thing for herself, she lay on her back and kicked. When she wanted it for the children, she lay on her stomach and cried. Either way she got what she wanted."

The turkey-wing fan waved back and forth, then Miss Gibbie got up. "This is dirty work we are doing. I prefer to make my remarks to people's faces so they can remark back. And this isn't what I came to this meeting for. I know the talk that has been going around lately about Mary Cary. Lizzie Pryor has led it, and I came here this morning to tell her so. The people in Yorkburg are like all other people. They pat the fat shoulder, and shake the full hand, and eat of the bounty, and then, when some jealous-minded, squint-eyed Christian, so-called, starts questions and speculations, everybody repeats them and some try to answer."

"But why are you talking to us like this, Miss

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Gibbie? We are Mary's friends and oughtn't to be taken to task for what we haven't done and don't approve of," said Mrs. Corbin. "We—"

"Then if you are Mary's friends you will tell other people what I am telling you. You will cut short all this twaddle about her great wealth and Western ways and numberless beaux. It's the last that sticks so in Puss Jenkins's throat. Puss never had a beau herself, and she can't get reconciled to Mary's many."

"Oh, she did have one." Mrs. Moon spoke for the first time since Mrs. Pryor left. "Don't you remember Mr. Thoroughgood?"

"He never courted her. He told me so himself. He thought over it and prayed over it, and at last decided he'd do it, but he never did. He bought her a box of candy for which he paid sixty cents—told me that, too—and went to the house prepared to speak the word. I remember the night very well. He tiptoed up the front steps and stood on the porch where he could hear voices in the parlor. Puss and her mother were talking, and 'Mercy on me,' he said, 'I never had such a narrow escape in all my life. She was scolding her mother, quarrelling with her, lecturing her for something. I tell you I tiptoed down in a hurry.'"

Miss Gibbie made the mincing steps of Mr. Thoroughgood and so mimicked his thin, piping voice that all laughed, then she nodded at Mrs. Moon—"I got the candy.

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"But to go back to Mary. She has heard some of the things said about her, and so have I. Mrs. Deford told her Yorkburg did not need to be washed and ironed, and Lizzie Bettie Pryor wrote her a note informing her Southern people had no sympathy with Northern ideas, and if she wished to keep her old friends in Yorkburg she should be more careful in making new acquaintances. Now this is what I want understood. She is my friend. If any one wishes to ask questions about her, come to me. For statements made against her I will go to them. She has no mother. I have no child. As long as I am here and she is here, we are to be reckoned with together. This is what I came here to say. You can repeat it. I will see that Lizzie Pryor and her daughters hear it, and Mrs. Deford and Puss Jenkins and Mr. Benny Brickhouse—"

The door opened noisily and again the maid-servant's head was thrust in. "Mis' Tate," she said, excitedly, "somebody done phone from Mis' Pryor's and say Mr. Pryor done gone and died. She say please somebody come on down there quick, that Mis' Pryor is just carryin' on awful."

The ladies sprang to their feet with shocked and frightened faces, but it was Miss Gibbie who spoke.

"Poor William!" she said. "Poor William! Lizzie knew he could never eat sausage, and she had it this morning for breakfast!"

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III

APPLE-BLOSSOM LAND

SEVERAL days had passed since gentle William Pryor had at last found rest. Yorkburg recovering from its shock, took up once more the placid movement of its life.

Mary Cary opened her shutters and with hands on the window-sill leaned out and took a deep breath, then she laughed and nodded her head. "Good-morning sun," she said, "good-morning birds, good-morning everything!" Her eyes swept the scene before her, absorbed greedily its every detail, then rested on the orchard to the right.

"Oh, you beautiful apple blossoms! You beautiful, beautiful apple blossoms!" She threw them a kiss. "And to think you are mine—mine!"

In her voice was a quivering little catch, and presently she dropped on her knees by the open window and rested her arms on the sill. Again her eyes swept sky and field, now glancing at the lawn of velvet green, now at the upturned earth on the left,

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the orchard on the right, the thread of water in the distance winding lazily in and out at the foot of low hills, and now at the sun, well up from the soft dawning of another day, and suddenly she stretched out her arms.

"God," she said, "God, I am so glad—so glad!"

For some minutes she knelt, her chin in the palms of her hands, her gaze wandering down the road to the little town less than a mile away, and presently she laughed again as if at some dear memory. It was so good to be among the old loved things, the straggling streets and shabby houses, the buttercups and dandelions, and the friends of other days. It was good, and out loud she said again: "I am so glad."

"Your bath, mein Fräulein."

She got up; the soft gown falling from bare shoulders stirred in the light breeze. She pulled the ribbons from the long braids of hair, and coiled them round her head, but she did not leave the window.

"All right, I'll be there in a minute." Then: "Hedwig?"

"Yes, mein Fräulein."

"Do you think I could have the day to myself? I have something important to do, and I can't do it if constantly interrupted. If any one comes, could you keep me from knowing it?"

"I think so, mein Fräulein."

The shadow of a smile hovered a moment on

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Hedwig's lips. "Does that mean all and everybody, or—"

"Everybody! Of course not Miss Gibbie, but everybody else. I shall not be at home, you see. I will be down in the orchard, and if Miss Gibbie comes bring her there, but never, never let any one else come there, Hedwig."

"I understand, mein Fräulein."

The door was closed quietly, and the girl now standing in front of her mirror looked into it first with unseeing eyes, then suddenly with critical ones.

"You must look your best to-night, Mary Cary. You don't want to go to that meeting. You don't like to do a lot of things you've got to do if you're to be a brave lady, but Martha knows nothing is accomplished by wanting only, and Martha is going to make you talk to those men to-night." She leaned closer to the mirror. "I wonder how you happened to have light eyes when you like dark ones so much better, and brown hair when black is so much prettier? You should be thankful you don't have to use curlers, and that you have plenty of color, but every now and then I wish you were a raging beauty, so men would do what you want."

Her brow ridged in fine upright folds as if thinking, then she turned, nodding her head in decision. "I will wear that white embroidered mull to-night. It is so soft and sweet and silly, and men like things like that."

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Some hours later, household duties having been attended to, fresh flowers cut and the stable visited, the little vine-draped shelter made of saplings, stripped of branch but not of bark, and canvas-covered on the top, was the point of destination; but first she stood on the front porch and looked up and down the sandy road which could be well seen from the hilltop. No sign of life upon it, she turned and went through the hall to the back porch and down the steps to the orchard, in one hand writing-materials, in the other pieces of stale bread for the birds; and as she walked she hummed a gay little tune to whose rhythm she unconsciously kept step.

Many of the trees were old and bent and twisted in fantastic shapes—some were small and partly dead, but most were fit for some festival of the gods; and as she went in and out among them, her feet making but slight impression on the moist springy soil, grass-grown and sprinkled with petals, pink and white, she stopped now and then and touched first one and then the other, for a swift moment laid her cheek on the rough bark as if to send a message to its heart.

From the shelter she drew out a rug, spread it close to her best-loved tree, then sitting upon it leaned against the trunk, feet crossed and hands clasped loosely behind her head. The chirp of sparrows and twitter of small birds, the clear song of robin and the cat-bird's call fell after a while unheeding on her ears, and the drowsy hum of insects was lost in the dream-

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ing that possessed her. From the garden of old-fashioned flowers some distance off the soft breeze flung fragrance faint and undefined, and for a while she was a child again—the child who used to run away in the springtime and hide in the orchard, that she might say her prayers before a shrine of unknown name.

Presently she sat upright and opened her portfolio. "And now to think it is mine, Aunt Katherine, mine!" she began. "At last everything is ready, everything is finished, and I am in my own home. I am still full of wonder and unbelief, still not understanding how Tree Hill is my property. The quaint old house is not degraded by its changes, and already I love its every room, its every outlook; and if you and Uncle Parke and the children do not soon come I shall be of all creatures the most disappointed and indignant. I want you to see the beautiful things Miss Gibbie has done. Of course, Yorkburg doesn't understand; doesn't know why I am back, and why I am living alone save for the servants; and some don't approve. That the once charity child who lived at the asylum should now own Tree Hill is something of a trial, and that it could happen without their knowledge or consent is grievous unto them. But they have been so good to me, all the old friends; are glad, they say, to have me back, and I am so happy to be back. There have been changes, but not many. The mills and factories have brought new

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people, some of the old ones have died, the little ones grown up, several have married and gone away to live, but it is the same sunshiny little place, and I love it. In the months spent with Miss Gibbie, waiting for Tree Hill to be made ready to live in, there was the restless feeling that belongs to temporary arrangement, but now I am home; here to live and work, and the only shadow is that the big and little Aldens are not here, too. And what a relief to Miss Gibbie to be once more by herself! I couldn't keep people away, and I was constantly afraid she would take a broom and sweep them out. How she does hate to have people in her house unless she sends for them! Man may not have been meant to live alone, but Miss Gibbie was—"

The rustle of skirts made her look up, and quickly she was on her feet, her arms around her visitor's waist, cheek pressed close to cheek.

"Oh, dear, I am so glad you've come. I was going—"

"To choke me, crush me, knock me down and sit on me, were you? Well, you're to do nothing of the kind. And it's too hot to embrace. Stand straight and let me look at you. How did you sleep last night?"

"I don't know. Wasn't awake long enough to find out. Oh, Miss Gibbie, if you were a little girl I'd play all around the green grass with you! Apple-Blossom Land is the place to play it in, and this is

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Apple-Blossom Land! And to think—to think that it is mine!"

"Why not? Why shouldn't what you want be yours? Heaven knows an old house on a hilltop, with some twisted trees on the side and cornfields at the back, isn't much to dance over; but things have in them what we get out of them, and if you will stop hugging me and get me something to sit on I will be obliged."

"Will the rug do?"

"Rug? How could I get up if I ever got down? No. Get me a chair. What are you out here for, anyhow? Bugs and bees and birds may like such places, but being a mere human being I prefer indoors."

"Then we will go in. I came out here so as to be not at home if any one came up to see me."

"Hiding, are you? If you don't want to see people, why see them?" She waved her turkey-wing fan inquiringly. "Nonsense such as this will force you on the roof, if you'd say your prayers in private, and you're making a bad beginning. Have you got that list of the councilmen? I want to see it again."

Mary Cary picked up her writing-materials, crumbled the bread and threw it to the birds, and, with arm in Miss Gibbie's, turned toward the house.

"It's on the library table. I've seen every one of them. I'm sure it's going to be all right."

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"You are? That's because you are yet young. Never be sure a man in politics is going to do what he says until he does it. When he makes you a promise, just ask him to kindly put his name to it. I'm like a darkey—I've more confidence in a piece of paper with some writing on it than in the spoken word. Men mean well, and they'll promise a woman heaven or hell to get rid of her, but you can't trust them. How about Mr. Chinn?"

"Hardest of all. He can't speak correctly, and has never been out of Yorkburg a week in his life. And yet he says we've got as good streets as we need, and he doesn't approve of all this education, anyhow."

"Naturally. People are generally opposed to things they know nothing about. Here, Hedwig, take my hat and bring me some iced tea—and next time your Fräulein hides in the orchard you can find her and not send me there."

Blowing somewhat from her walk, Miss Gibbie dropped in a chair in the hall, unfastened the strings of her broad-brimmed hat and handed it to Hedwig. Spreading out her ample skirts, she pulled off her white cotton gloves, opened the bag hanging from her waist, took from it a handkerchief of finest thread, and with it wiped her face. After a moment she glanced around. "A house knows when it is occupied. Sleeping here has given things a different air." She looked at the girl standing in front of her, hands clasped behind, and the turkey-wing fan

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stopped on its backward motion. "You are sure you will not be lonely? Sure you will not be afraid?"

"Afraid! I'm not just Mary Cary, I'm Martha Cary also. Martha has never been afraid, and Mary has never been lonely in her life. And I love it so, my little Harmony House! Oh, Miss Gibbie, you have been so good, so precious good!" The strong young arms reached down, and on her warm breast she drew the anxious face of the older woman, kissed it swiftly, then pushed her back against the cushions. "If only you would let me tell how good you've been!"

"If only you would behave yourself and get me some tea I would think more of you. There are many things I might forgive, but never the telling of my private affairs. Where is that list of City Fathers? Here, get me another chair. One feels like a kitty puss on a feather-bed in a thing of this kind. I prefer to sit like a human being."

With an effort she extricated herself from the depths of the big chintz-covered chair and took a tall straight one near the table on which Hedwig was placing iced tea and sandwiches, and as she reached for the tea with her right hand, she held out her left for the paper Mary Cary was bringing to her.

She glanced down its length, and for some moments drank her tea in silence save for an occasional

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grunt which was half sniff, half snort; then as she put down her glass and took up a sandwich she waved the paper in good-natured derision.

"And that's what governs us—that!

"Oh, august body of assembled men,
The gods in thee have come to earth again!"

She bit into the sandwich and again skimmed the paper. "These are the individuals who make our local laws and do with our taxes what they will. Listen:

"'1. Josiah Chinn, Undertaker.' Deals with the dead. An eye single to the grave.

"'2. Franklin Semph, Machine Agent.' Travels. Sleeps home two nights in the week. Drinks.

"'3. Richard Moon, President Woolen Mills.' In council as matter of conscience. Only attends when Mary Cary makes him.

"'4. Jefferson Mowry. Chewer and spitter.' Livery business. Reads less than he writes—never writes.

"'5. Jacob Walstein, born Pawnbroker, now Banker.' Rich and rising.

"'6. Williamson Brent, General Merchandise.' Votes as he's told by the last person who tells. Putty man.

"'7. Blacker Ash, Secretary and Treasurer of Yorkburg Shoe Factory.' Sensible and good worker. Bachelor. Does as Miss Cary tells him.

"'8. John Armitage. Soap-box politician.' Clerk

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in Mr. Blick's grocery store. Salary eight dollars per week. When it's ten he will marry; told me so.

"'9. Robertson Grey, Lawyer.' Well born and lazy.

"'10. Patrick Milligan.' Whiskey business and good talker. Slippery."

She crumpled the paper and threw it at the girl standing in front of her. "There," she said, "there's the list of your Yorkburg Fathers. I hope Hedwig will fumigate you when you get home to-night."

"She will if necessary." The crumpled paper was smoothed and folded carefully. "But I don't believe it will be. I've taken tea with most of their families."

"You've taken *what?*" Miss Gibbie bounced half-way out of her chair.

"Tea." Mary Cary's head nodded affirmatively. "That's what I said, tea—I mean supper. I invited myself to some of the places, but some of the people invited me themselves. I'm afraid I did hint a little. But we had a good time, and I've got my little piece of paper—see!"

She held a note-book toward Miss Gibbie, but the latter waved it back. "Do you mean you sat down at the table and ate with them?"

"That's what I did. It would have been better could they have sat down at my table and eaten with me, for then I could have selected the things to eat, and food makes such a difference in a man's feelings.

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But there isn't such a great difference in people when you know them through and through, and I had a lovely time taking supper with them. I really did. I told you about the Milligans. Don't you remember I was sick the next day?"

Miss Gibbie shook her head. "Never told me. Glad you were sick."

"Not sick enough to hurt, or to keep me from the Mowrys the next night. The Mowrys didn't have but four kinds of bread and three kinds of cake and two kinds of meats and some other things, but you couldn't see a piece of Mrs. Milligan's table-cloth as big as a salt-cellar, it was so full of food. I took some of everything on the table. Mr. Milligan kept handing me things from his end and Mrs. Milligan from her end, and the little Milligans from the sides, and we laughed so much and I tried so hard to eat I got really excited about it, and of course I was sick the next day. But it didn't matter. We had a beautiful time, and I learned things I never knew before."

She dropped on her knees by the older woman and crossed her arms on her lap. "When I was a little girl, Miss Gibbie, and lived here in the asylum, I used to wish I was a fairy or a witch or a wizard, or something that could make great changes, could turn things round and upside down; could put poor people where were rich, put sad ones where were happy, put the lowly where were the high, and see what

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they would do. And in the years I have been away, almost ten years, I have been thinking and watching and wondering if half the trouble in the world is not from misunderstanding, from not knowing each other better. And how can we know if each stays in his own little world, never touches the other's life?" She laughed, nodding her head. "I wouldn't discuss Flaubert with Mr. Milligan or Greek Art with Mr. Chinn, but they can tell me a good deal about Yorkburg's needs; and, after all, a person's heart is more important than his head. We are educating people at a terrible rate, but what are we going to do about it if we're not friends when we're through? Of course you can't see my way. You hate dirty people to come near you, but how get them clean if we keep from them?"

Miss Gibbie took up her fan and used it as if already the atmosphere were affected, then she tapped the face in front of her. "I used to be young once and dreamed dreams, but I dreamed them in my own house. I might understand how you could eat with any sort of sinner—I've eaten with all sorts—but with people who put their knives in their mouths and don't clean their finger-nails!"

She lay back in her chair, chin up and eyebrows lifted, and Mary Cary, getting on her feet, laughed, then leaned over and kissed her.

"To-morrow night I am going to the McDougals'. Susie McDougal's beau, Mr. John Armitage, the

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soap-box politician, is to be there. You don't mind, do you?"

Miss Gibbie's mouth, eyes, and nose all screwed together, and the turkey-wing fan was held at arm's-length. "He uses hair-oil. Yes, I mind, but I remember I was not to interfere."

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IV

THE COUNCIL CHAMBER

MISS GIBBIE would not stay to dinner. "I am fond of you, my dear," she said, tying the ribbon strings loosely under her chin, "but I might not be if I had to talk to you after a full meal. And that's the trouble — you make me talk too much. If you prefer this middle-class custom of a mid-day dinner, follow it, but don't ask me to join you."

Mary Cary laughed. "I don't think it's middle-class. I think it's nice; it's Southern." Miss Gibbie's broad-brimmed hat was straightened, the crumpled ribbons smoothed, the plump cheeks kissed. "And if I didn't have dinner at two o'clock I couldn't have supper at seven. Thin ham and beaten biscuits and salads and iced tea and summer things like that are much nicer than meats and vegetables and desserts on warm nights. I'm not stylish. I'm just Mary Cary, who loves old-fashioned ways and things."

"Old-fashioned *ways* and *things!*" Miss Gibbie's hands went up. "To-morrow all Yorkburg will be

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calling you a young woman of shocking ideas, one who actually knows something about business, about the town's financial condition and the things it needs and should have. You will be served at breakfast, dinner, and supper; held up as an example of the pernicious effects of higher education followed by foreign travel. To-night you are going to do what has never been done here before, and who is going to imagine you love old-fashioned ways and things? A woman has never crossed the threshold of Yorkburg's Council Chamber—"

"A good many are going to cross it to-night."

Miss Gibbie, who had started to the door, turned. "You mean a good many have promised. A very different thing. Women are cowards when it comes to a change of custom. They like their little cages. They would rather stay in and look on than come out and help. Don't expect too much of them. They have so long thought as men told them God intended them to think that it will take time for them to realize the Almighty may not object to their inquiring if they're thinking right or not. Good-bye, child. If any fireworks go off, keep your head and send up a few yourself. Heavens, if I were young!"

As she drove off, Mary Cary waved to her, then turned and stood a moment in the wide, cool hall, looking first in the library on the right, the dining-room on the left, at the broad, winding staircase in front, and through the open door at the end to the

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orchard, which in the distance could be glimpsed, and her hands clasped as if to press closely the happiness that filled her.

It was hers, all hers. The dream of her starved little heart, when, as a child, she had lived in the Yorkburg Orphan Asylum, had come true. She had a home of her own.

"And I didn't have to take a husband to get it," she said, nodding her head. "That's such a satisfaction."

She dropped in the big chintz-covered chair and, with elbows on its arms and finger-tips pressed to cheeks, surveyed critically the size and shape and furnishings of the rooms, then sighed in happy content.

"It's such a pity so many people still think a home *must* have a man in it. If a man belongs to you and is nice he might make the home nicer, but"—she shook her head—"Mrs. McDougal says there are times when a husband is a great trial. I haven't any brothers or a father, and I don't want to risk a trial yet. The reason most homes need men is because men mean money, I suppose. You can't sneeze without needing money. And yet"— she looked around —"everything in this house didn't cost as much as the rug Mrs. Maxwell has on her drawing-room floor. I don't wonder John loathes his house. You can't really see the price-tags on the things in it, but you're certain you could find them if you had the

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chance to look. I wonder where John's letter is?" She got up and went into the library, turned over papers and magazines on desk and tables, then rang for Hedwig.

"The mail?" she said. "Where did you put the letters this morning?"

Hedwig shook her head. "There no letters were this morning, mein Fräulein. Not one at all."

"That's queer! All right." Hedwig was waved away. "I wonder if anything is the matter? Of course there isn't—only—there haven't been three Mondays since I left here that John's letter didn't come on the early mail." She straightened a rose that was falling out of a jar and stood off to watch the effect. "Nobody but John would write every week, when I don't write once in four—don't even read his letters for days after they come, sometimes. But I like to know they're here. I believe"—she clasped her hands behind her head—"I believe I wish I had let him come down to-night. No, I don't. But why didn't he write? He ought to have known—" She turned away. "It would serve me right if he never wrote again."

By seven o'clock she was on her way to the monthly meeting of the town council, which meeting was always held on the second Monday evening in the month, and as she started off she waved to Hedwig, standing in the door.

"Telephone Miss Gibbie not to sit up for me,"

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she called back. "I'm going to stay all night with her, but it may be late before I get there. Don't forget!" And again the hand was waved; and as she drove down the dusty road, Ephraim beside her, the uncertainty of the morning faded and her spirits rose at the prospect of the experience awaiting.

"You see," she thought to herself, "I've had the advantage of being poor and not expecting things to go just as I want them, so it takes a great deal to discourage me. When you're dealing with human nature it's the unexpected you must expect. 'Human nature are a rascal,' Mrs. McDougal says, and Mrs. McDougal's observations come terribly near being true." She laughed and whistled softly, but at Ephraim's discreet cough stopped and turned toward him.

"I oughtn't to do it, ought I, Ephraim? It isn't nice. I am afraid I forget sometimes I am really and truly grown up."

"I reckon you does." Ephraim touched his hat. "You's right smart of a child yet in some things, 'count of yo' young heart, I reckon. I ain't never seen nobody who could see the sunny side like you kin, but it ain't all sunny, Miss Mary, this worl' ain't, and there's a lot of pesky people in it." He coughed again. "Sometimes folks seem to forgit you is your grandpa's grandchild. Yo' grandpa was the high-steppinist gentleman I ever seen in my life, but since you been goin' down among them mill folks and

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factory folks and takin' an intrus' in 'em, lookin' into how things is, some of them King Street people seem to think, scusin' of my sayin' it, that maybe it's yo' father's blood what's comin' out in you."

Mary Cary laughed. "I hope it is. My father was a very sensible gentleman, and didn't ask others what he must or must not do. But his people in England would be more shocked than—" She stopped and her lips twisted in a queer little smile. "Put me down here, Ephraim. I am going first to Mrs. Corbin's."

Twenty minutes later she and Mrs. Corbin walked up the steps of the side entrance of the town hall into the room where all public meetings were held, and where all business connected with the town's interest was transacted. As they reached the top the hum of many voices greeted them. The narrow passage-way was half filled with men. Some were standing, hands in pockets; some, balancing themselves on the railing, with feet twisted around its spokes, held their hands loosely clasped in front, while others leaned against the wall, scribbled over with pencil-marks and finger-prints of varying sizes, and ahead, through the open door, could be seen both men and women.

As they came nearer, those on the railing jumped down; those leaning against the wall straightened, and those in front made way, while hats came off and spitting ceased.

"Good-evening," she said. "We are going to

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have a nice meeting, aren't we?" She held out her hand. "How do you do, Mr. Jernigan. Is Jamie better to-night?"

"Yes, ma'am; thank you, ma'am. He's right sharp better to-night. He's pleased as Punch over those drawing things you sent him. Been at 'em all day."

"That's good." She reached the door, then turned, taking off her long, light coat which covered the white dress. "Aren't you men coming in?"

"Yes'm—that is, those of us what can." It was Mr. Flournoy, foreman of the woolen mills, who spoke. "There ain't much room in there left and they say some more ladies is coming, so we thought we might as well stay out as come out. We can hear all right."

"I'm sorry. The women ought not to take the men's places. Can't you—"

"Oh, that's all right." Mr. Jernigan waved his hat toward her. "We done our work before we come here. Ain't a man in the council what don't know how we stand, and what we won't do for them is a plenty if they don't tote square. You just go on in, Miss Cary—you and Mrs. Corbin."

As they entered the room there was much uprising and many seats were offered, but with a nod here and there they made their way toward a window near which Mrs. Webb and Mrs. Moon were sitting and took two chairs which had been kept for them. To the left were Mrs. Brent and Mrs. Burnham, to the

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right Miss Mittie Muncaster and Mrs. Dunn, while behind was Miss Amelia Taylor, president of the Mother's Club, with Miss Victor Redway, the new kindergarten teacher from Kentucky. A dozen other women, scattered in groups here and there, were whispering as if at a home funeral, and along the walls men, ranged in rows, hats in hands, chewed with something of nervous uncertainty as to the wisdom of the innovation which they were about to witness. In a large chair on a small platform Mr. Chinn, president of the council, sat in solemn silence, gavel in hand, waiting for the hour to strike, and for once in its history all ten of the city fathers were on time and in place.

"You may not mind this, Mary, but I do," said Mrs. Moon half under her breath. "I'm not used to these new-fashioned ways of doing things. I feel like I haven't got on all my clothes. I came because you told me I ought to, and of course women should take interest in things of this sort, but I don't like it. I—"

"Then you were dear to come." And Mary gave the soft, pretty hands a squeeze. "I don't like it either, but neither do I like Yorkburg's not having a high school. Don't look so uneasy. Nobody is going to bite. Have you seen Mr. Milligan? A frog couldn't look more like a frog. He'll pop presently, he's so pleased about something. There—they're going to begin."

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She leaned back in her chair, and as Mr. Chinn rose in his seat and rapped on the table the crowd in the passage pressed closer to the door. All who could came inside, but no longer was there standing-room, and the air that might have come through the open windows was kept back by the men who had climbed up in them and were swinging their feet below.

The gavel again sounded. "The meeting will come to order!"

Mr. Chinn, in his long frock-coat and white string tie, stood a moment surveying with mournful eye the crowded room, and in his voice, as he repeated "The meeting will come to order!" was the assurance that all flesh is as grass, and though in a field it may flourish it will finally be cut down.

But not yet could the meeting come to order. As Mr. Simson, the clerk, stood up and began to call the roll there was the shuffle of many feet in the hall and the men near the door parted to make way for late but determined arrivals.

"Mrs. McDougal and every blessed member of her family!"

Under her breath Mary Cary laughed, then beckoned, and in pressed Mrs. McDougal and made her way toward the platform, undismayed by the gazing, smiling crowd. Behind were her five boys and four girls, and behind them Mr. McDougal, but in the shelter of Mr. Blick's broad

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back Mr. McDougal stopped and was seen no more.

But Mrs. McDougal was seen. Ushering the children ahead, she placed them one by one on the edge of the platform, at the feet of Mr. Chinn, all but Susie, who with flaming face had sought refuge on half of Mary Cary's chair, then she waved to Mr. Simson, the clerk.

"Please hold on a minute, Mr. Simson," she called. "I'm awful sorry we're late, but them five voters to be was hard to get fixed in time. They know what they're here for and I don't want 'em to miss a word. Sit still there, Jeff!" She jabbed the latter, who was wriggling, back in his place and took from Billy the cap he was nervously chewing, then seating herself between the younger set of twins she again waved her hand.

"Now you can go on."

Thus permitted, Mr. Simson began the reading of the minutes of the last meeting in quick staccato sentences, and as he took his seat Mr. Chinn again sounded the gavel and in an attitude of resignation asked if there were corrections.

None being suggested, the minutes were approved. The regular business of the meeting forthwith began, and the atmosphere, which had been a little tense, relaxed. As if to show his ease and familiarity with an unusual situation, Mr. Mowry cut off a large piece of tobacco, crossed his hands

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behind his head, and lifted his right leg on the top of the small oak desk which was supposed to contain pen and paper for personal use, but which had thus far served only as a footstool; and as he did so he winked at young Armitage, whose face was a fiery flame, and whose hands, wet with perspiration, were twisting in nervous knots a handkerchief of highly colored border.

Little by little routine matters were disposed of, and, finally, there being no further excuse for delay, the call for new business was made and Mr. Milligan arose. With fingers in the armholes of his vest, with shoulders back and chest expanded, he bowed with smiling eyes to the platform, to the crowded room, to the ladies at his right, and as he bowed there was stir and rustle and the straining forward of necks and heads.

"Mr. President"—his heels were lifted from the floor and he balanced himself on tiptoe—"Mr. President, members of the Yorkburg Council, fellow-citizens, and ladies"—again he bowed profoundly—"a distinguished honor has been bestowed upon me to-night, and as long as life shall last I will look back upon this occasion as the proudest moment of my life. We have met to-night not only to do our plain duty as citizens of a noble town, but to look with far-seeing eyes into that great future which stretches endlessly and forever on, and which can be made as beautiful as—er, as—er the New Jerusalem or—er,

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or—er Richmond or New York. We must show the watching world that we citizens of old Yorkburg"—his right hand made a wide inclusive sweep—"we citizens are awake, are up and looking around. We are no longer dead poor. Money is nine-tenths of much in life, but the other tenth is a busting big part. It's made of sense and hustle, and it's up to us to prove it! We've been excusin' of ourselves by saying poverty has paralyzed us, and we couldn't do this and we couldn't do that, because we didn't have the cash. Well, I'm here to say it ain't so. What we've been lackin' ain't so much the money as the spirit, and it's took a woman to make us find it out."

Back from the windows came a clapping of hands, from the doors a stamping of feet, and in the enforced pause Mr. Milligan wiped his shining face and swallowed hastily from the glass of water on the table.

"In my poor way, members of the Yorkburg Council," he began again—this time fingers interlaced and resting on his breast—"in my poor way I am here to present this lady to you. She don't need to be introduced to man, woman, or child in this community. She used to live here, and when she went away something left Yorkburg that everybody wished would come back. 'Twas a sort of sunshine. We didn't think she'd ever find the way back. There was a heap to make her forget, but she didn't forget. Love found the way, and she's back.

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Since she left she's seen a lot of life. She's been around the world, in the big cities and the little cities, and she's kept her eyes open and her mind open and her heart open, and there's much she could tell about what's wrong with us, but that ain't her way. She is here to-night to bring some matters to your attention which I hope you will consider with intelligence and appreciation, and just here I'd like to say that even if I didn't know what they were I would say in advance, 'You could put my vote down for 'em, Mr. Clerk.' I ain't saying all women have business sense. They ain't got it, but when they have, it's the far-seeingest sense on earth, and there ain't a star in the heavens a man can't climb to when a woman of that kind gives him a lift!"

Again a shuffle of feet, but Mr. Chinn's gavel came down heavily. He turned in his chair and looked first at Mr. Milligan and then at the clock.

"Oh, I know I'm talking too long, but, being started, it's hard to stop," and Mr. Milligan wiped his perspiring face and nodded good-naturedly at solemn Mr. Chinn. "I'm through, but I know I voice the sentiments of every member of this honorable body when I say it is highly honored by the presence here to-night of lovely woman! What would life be without her? As babies, she borns us; as boys, she bosses us; as men, she owns us; at death, she buries us, and she alone puts flowers on man's grave! Man was made to do her bidding, Mr. President, and if he's

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smart he'll do it quick. Members of the council, ladies, and gentlemen, I have the honor of presenting to you Miss Mary Cary, the granddaughter of a once chief justice of England and of Mayor Alden, a distinguished citizen of Virginia."

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V

IN WHICH MARY CARY SPEAKS

THE flourish of Mr. Milligan's hand as Mary Cary rose and came toward the platform was not to be resisted by Mrs. McDougal, who was clapping vehemently. She gave the hand a resounding smack.

"Fine words, Mr. Milligan, fine words! But a dead Irishman would make a good speech if you'd touch his tongue. You're an orationer, you are. Set down, quick! Miss Cary is going to speak."

"Mr. President, gentlemen of the council." The clear, fresh voice carried to the far corners of the room and upon the latter fell vibrating silence. "Yorkburg's fiscal year ending in June in the next few weeks, the annual budget for the coming twelve months will be fixed by you. Before this budget is made up I am going to ask you to act upon three propositions. Last year the total revenue of the town was $16,907.23, and your expenditures something under one thousand dollars less than your income. Out of your sinking-fund you retired a

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large proportion of your outstanding bonds, with the result that your indebtedness is now sufficiently small to justify your increasing it. I am here to-night to ask you to issue, during the next three months, fifty thousand dollars' worth of city bonds, interest on which is to be 3 per cent., payable semi-annually. If you will agree to do this promptly, Bartlett, Cramp & Company, of New York, will take the entire amount at once. At the expiration of twenty years these bonds are to be retired."

"In the name of glory!"

The words, half smothered, sounded even to the platform, and Mary Cary, catching them, laughed and nodded toward the source from which they came.

"Is there anything you wish to say, Mr. Billisoly, before I go on?"

The latter rose to his feet, put his hand to his mouth, coughed, and looked at Mr. Chinn.

"Yes'm, there is. Fifty thousand dollars is a powerful lot of money to borrow at one clip, and—"

"Three per cent. interest is powerful little money to pay for its use," she answered, smiling. "But that isn't all I am here to say. If you don't mind and will let me get through it will save time, and then questions can be asked and answered. Last year the rate of interest on all taxable property was one dollar and twenty-five cents per one hundred dollars. This year, Mr. Councilmen, if you really love York-

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burg, you will raise it to one dollar and thirty-five cents.

"Oh, I know." She laughed and lifted her hand as if to stop the unspoken protest of certain stirrings. "I know the name of taxes isn't truly pleasant to any one. But I have with me a list of taxpayers who agree to the increase asked for, and if you would like to see it, there is no objection to your doing so."

She opened her bag and took from it a roll of paper, and as she unwound it she threw one end to Mr. Ash, the chairman of the finance committee.

"This," she said, "is a list of the people who love their town enough to put their hands in their pockets to prove it. A truly trying test!" She held up her end of the paper. "There," she said, "there is the list."

Instinctively many leaned forward to see the paper which for reasons of her own she had made in one long, narrow ribbon, and as they did so she laughed again and nodded to the men at the desks. "The will of your constituents.

"And now"—she stepped back—"there is one thing more. Yorkburg has a friend who is greatly interested in its welfare. This friend believes the time has come when the town should take stock of itself, should look itself in the face and see just what sort of a town it is, and what it may be. As a friend of this friend of Yorkburg I am authorized to say that if this issue of fifty thousand dollars' worth of

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bonds be made promptly, the like amount of fifty thousand dollars will be at once deposited by Bartlett, Cramp & Company to the credit of your finance committee, said amount to be used for the relaying out of the town, the proper paving of streets, the planting of shade-trees, and the cleaning up of dirty places."

For a moment there was palpitating silence. No one moved. Eyes were fixed on her as if ears had not heard aright. The heads of some leaned forward, the bodies of others leaned back, then the clearing of throats and the shuffling of feet broke the pause that followed the statement which had just been heard, and back toward the door Mr. Benny Brickhouse arose.

"If he ain't the spittin' image of an orange with two peanuts underneath and one peanut on top, I never seen one," said Mrs. McDougal in a voice none too low, "and the top peanut ain't got a thing in it. Just listen at his cambric-needle squeak!"

"Mr. President." The thin, piping tones caused many to look around. "Mr. President, never before in its history has the council of Yorkburg heard from its platform such astounding propositions as have been made before it to-night. The young lady who has made them is doubtless actuated by high and lofty motives, but it is not to be expected that she should know what she is doing. It is out of her

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sphere, sir, the sphere in which God put woman and meant her to stay—"

"Please, sir, Mr. Chinn, may I ask Mr. Brickhouse if God Almighty told him He put woman in a sphere, or if a man told him?" and Mrs. McDougal, on her feet, held up her hand as a child in a classroom who asks to speak.

Mr. Chinn's gavel came down heavily and squelched the titter which threatened to be something more. "Mr. Brickhouse has the floor, Mrs. McDougal."

"And likely to keep it, sir. But go on, Mr. Brickhouse, go on! I thought maybe you'd just heard from the Lord. Beg your pardon, sir."

She sat down, waving her hand toward the round little man, speechless with amazement, then turned in a half whisper to the girl at her side.

"Let him talk, Miss Cary. Nothing shows the kind of fool you are as quick as your tongue. Balaam's Brickhouse won't hurt you."

"Mr. President"—the interruption was ignored, and only the trembling of the fine, thin voice gave evidence of anger—"Mr. President, Yorkburg is no pauper, and does not need the gift which has been offered it to-night, provided it will acknowledge it needs to be cleaned up. Yorkburg is a very clean place. Its streets were good enough for our fathers, and I, for one, protest against the supplanting of the trees they planted by the planting of more! We don't want more! And who is the person who offers

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this gift? Why is his name withheld? Is he ashamed of it, or is there a string tied to it which we don't see yet? What does the party want of us in return for this sum of money, gotten we know not how? It may be tarnished, sir, it may be tarnished!" His pudgy little hands smote the air with something of vehemence; then remembering that excitement was inelegant he wiped them carefully with his handkerchief, clasped them righteously together, and laid them on his stomach.

"And I would like to ask why this honorable body is called on to pass a measure which will plunge this old and distinguished town in such enormous indebtedness?" he began again, after a pause which he thought impressive. "Why should fifty thousand dollars' worth of bonds be issued? For what purpose will the money be used? Why should this great increase in taxes be made? What is to be done with the money drained from our people, who are not worshippers of Mammon and who set not their hearts on mere material things? I beg this honorable body not to be led astray. It will be a sad day for this city of a precious past—"

He stopped. Mary Cary's eyes, which in the beginning of his speech had been bent on a letter held in her hand lest the laughter in them be seen, were raised, and she was now looking at him with a steadiness which was disconcerting, and the words died upon his lips.

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"Are you through, Mr. Brickhouse?"

He sat down, wiping his moist face limply. "Yes, I am through."

This time Mary Cary, who had been standing below the platform, stepped upon it, and the letter she had been holding was laid upon the table.

"I am very much obliged to Mr. Brickhouse for asking the questions he has asked," she began. "Except the name of the person giving this money to Yorkburg there is no one of them that will not be answered readily, as they should be rightly. Whether we are entitled to peculiarities or not, all of us possess them, and one of this friend of Yorkburg's is that the gift and the giver should not be associated together; therefore, the name of this friend will not be known. Another characteristic of this same person is that before a place can be properly beautiful it should be made sound and solid and healthy. The foundation must come first, and the foundation of any town which would have a future is to know what it is about and what it is working toward. Yorkburg is badly laid out. It isn't laid out at all, and many of its streets start and end as they please. An elemental need of Yorkburg is that it should be laid out anew, and by a competent civil engineer who knows what he is about. This engineer will be provided when you agree to use his services. Mr. Brickhouse says we have a precious past. That is true, but a precious past doesn't make good walking,

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and, not being dead, our feet have some rights. There is no string tied to this gift of fifty thousand dollars save the restriction that the money be expended for the purposes mentioned.

"You see"—she turned to the councilmen in front and nodded to them—"when the matters brought before you to-night were mentioned to Mr. Brickhouse he was not interested, and did not care to put his name to the list of taxpayers who are willing to increase their taxes in order that Yorkburg may get a new bonnet and gloves and good stout shoes for its feet. He thinks they are not needed, and instead of expenditure, economy should be your keynote." She shook her head. "There are times when too much economy is as ruinous as too great expenditure. Some women die from it every year.

"But before coming here to-night I did try to understand what I was about." She tucked a curl which had slipped from under her hat back in place. "I learned from your mayor that the town is financially able to do what it is asked to do. We need two new school-buildings—one for primary and grammar grades, one for a high-school. The increase of taxes is needed to pay the interest on the new bonds, needed for many more things than it will supply."

For a half moment she looked around the room, then again turned to the men immediately in front, and her hands made a swift, appealing gesture.

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"Gentlemen, you have done so splendidly. For so long there was so little to do with. For many years the struggle for life and honor gave your fathers no time for thought of other things, but they held their heads up through it all, and you—you are your fathers' sons! In the years I have been away I never saw anything beautiful or useful or splendid, never saw good streets, schools, libraries, churches, parks, playgrounds, galleries, museums, baths, kindergartens, never saw a good idea in operation, or anything that made life nicer and better that I didn't wish Yorkburg had it. I was always wishing it could be the cleanest, prettiest, happiest of all places on this earth to live in, and when I came back and saw what you had done, saw there was good water, good sewerage, good lights, a few good streets, I was as proud and pleased as if—as if I'd been your mother!"

She joined in the laugh that followed, then shook her head. "But, gentlemen, people who don't do anything keep at it. A big idea means big things, and if everybody pulls together we can do lots for Yorkburg. And you don't really love what you don't work for, don't deny yourself a little bit for, don't take some risk with. Some say there's risk in marriage, but people get married. They want to. We can do anything for Yorkburg we want to if we just want hard enough. Everybody agrees that we need a high-school and a new grammar school. We've

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needed them for years, and there were few people who pay taxes who didn't sign this petition readily. Nearly everybody wants children to have a chance."

"Did the biggest taxpayer in Yorkburg sign it?" It was Mr. Billisoly who asked the question.

"Who is that?"

"Mr. John Maxwell, owner of the Yorkburg shoe factory, ice factory, electric-light plant; owner of more than any one man in town, if he don't live here."

Mary Cary took up her end of the paper and examined it. "His name is the first on the list. Next is Mr. Moon, then Mr. Walstein, Mr. Ash, Mr. Wilson, Mr.—"

"Is Miss Gibbie Gault's name there?"

"It is."

"Wonder!" Mr. Billisoly blew his nose and turned to the man at his side. "Looks like she's got it all there. If she could land Miss Gibbie the rest were easy."

"Tell me she and Miss Cary are great friends. They say the old lady is as smart as the devil and he'd be much more apt to get out of her way than she out of his if they met. Listen, there goes Sunny Chinn. Ain't he a cheerful thing to look at?"

The latter had risen, and again the table was struck by the gavel, which through the evening his hand had not relinquished. "Are there any further remarks to be made? If not—"

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"Yes, sir." Mr. Ranlet, owner and proprietor of the Yorkburg bakery, rose from his seat. "I'd like to ask something about this firm of Bartlett, Cramp & Company, who is willing to buy bonds that only pay 3 per cent. How does Miss Cary know that?"

"I have a letter to that effect." She opened her bag and took from it a letter. "This," she said, holding it up, "is the letter which states that they will make this purchase for a customer, provided it can be done promptly. Mr. Moon, Mr. Walstein, any one doing business in New York can tell you the character and reputation of this company."

"I suppose the name of the customer is not mentioned?"

"Yes. It is a Mr. Black, of Brooklyn."

"The same one who has been buying property around here lately?"

"The same one. I understand he is thinking of coming here to live."

"Must have plenty of money. Not many people jump at 3-per-cent. town bonds."

"Then we ought to jump quick lest he change his mind."

"I move the matter be referred to the finance committee." It was Mr. Mowry who spoke, and instantly Mr. Ash, who had said nothing so far, was on his feet.

"Mr. President, such reference would be a waste of time. As chairman of the finance committee I

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have called the latter together and talked with them concerning this proposition of an issue of bonds which I knew would be brought before you to-night. We agreed to recommend it heartily, and I move that the question be put at once."

The motion, made and carried quickly, was greeted with deafening applause by the visitors sitting, standing, or balanced in the window-seats, and then some one moved for an executive session, and slowly the crowd began to stir and go out.

"It's going to be all right, Mary." Mr. Moon patted the latter's hands encouragingly. "We are going to increase the taxes, accept the money, and build the schools, and if you will please take Mrs. Moon home I will be obliged. Her face has been like a beet all the evening. Oh, how do you do, Mrs. McDougal?" and he shook kindly the rough red hand held out toward him.

"And I'm glad to see you, Mr. Moon. I tell you this has been a night, ain't it? I've had a fine time, though I'd had a finer if an edjucatid tongue was in my mouth, and I could have mentioned some of the things I know of as Yorkburg needs. What we goin' home for, being you ain't through, they say? I hope you will tell those men who are to act on something that if they don't act right they'll never get a vote from my boys when they turn twenty-one. I ain't sayin' I understood all what Miss Cary said to-night about bonds and things, but I'd follow her in the

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dark, and ain't anybody such a fool as not to know what fifty thousand dollars could do for a place or a person. Of course, being just a woman—and men think women is just canary birds or dray horses—I don't have no say in things like this, but I've borned five sayers, and I'm goin' to keep my eye on 'em to see what they do when they get a chance. Yes, sir, there's to be a knowin' why if she don't get what she wants. In the four factories there's two hundred and ninety-three voters, John Armitage says, and they're solid to a man for Miss Cary. Just tell 'em that for me, will you? Good-night. Come on, children! I wonder where McDougal is? A dead chicken's got more spirit in company than he has! Good-night, Miss Cary, and don't forget we're expectin' of you to tea to-morrow night. Peggy ain't slept for a week thinkin' about it."

At the door a group of men stood talking. "Regular hunks, weren't they?" said Mr. Jernigan, taking his pipe out of his pocket and knocking the bowl against the palm of his hand. "And she didn't waste words in throwing them out, either. Fifty thousand dollars in bonds asked for as cool as snow, and looking like a blush-rose when she did it. Fifty thousand dollars, too, handed out for a gift like 'twas an every-day thing for Yorkburg to get it. She said she had a surprise for us. 'Twas a cracker-jack. Wish one of that kind would knock me in the head! Taxes increased from $1.25 to $1.35! George, it does

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you good to hear the stuff called for like that. Them that's got it ought to pay for having!"

"But she believes in everybody paying. Don't you remember the day she come down to the mills at lunch-time and told us we oughtn't to ask for a reading-room where books from the library up on King Street could be got without our goin' for 'em, unless we were willin' to help pay for the keep of the room? Don't you remember? I do." And Mr. Flournoy took the match held out by Mr. Jernigan and passed it on to the man standing next.

"Yes, I remember. She made us all chip in. Right, too. It costs forty dollars a month to run that room, and we don't pay but twenty. Don't know where the other twenty comes from, but she does, and that goes in mill-town."

"She's got a clear head, Miss Cary has. And the reason I like to hear her talk is I can hook on to what she says." Mr. Flournoy walked over to the window and measured the distance to a given spot below with his lips. "No beatin' round to keep you from knowin' what she means. What kind of slush was that Bailly Ass Brickhouse tryin' to get off, anyhow? Any of you catch on?

"Didn't listen. Heard his junk before. He says he traces himself back to Adam in this town, but if he ever give it as much as a ginger-cake it's been kept a secret. Here comes Miss Cary now."

Mr. Jernigan took off his hat, and on his finger

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twirled it round and round. "My wife's been sick in bed ten weeks come Friday," he said, presently, "and there ain't been a one of 'em Miss Cary hasn't been to bring her some outdoor thing, as well as other kinds. Mollie says when she comes in the room, spring things come with her."

He stood aside, then took the hand held out as she came toward him.

"Didn't we have a grand meeting?" she said, nodding lightly to first one and then the other. "I believe it's going to be all right, and you can tell your wives their children will go to a high-school yet. I'm so glad all you men came. Thank you very much—"

"You didn't need us." The man standing next to the steps laughed. "The work was done before to-night. You had your ducks in a row all right."

"And not a single one quacked wrong! Didn't they do beautifully? Thank everybody for coming. Good-night." And in the darkness they could hear her laughing with Mrs. Moon and Mrs. Corbin as they went together down the street.

A few minutes later in Miss Gibbie's library she was dancing that lady of full figure round and round the room, and not for some seconds would she stop.

"Oh, Miss Gibbie, if you'd just been there! Not a sign of fight from any one, and as to fireworks, there wasn't a pop-cracker! Mr. Benny Brickhouse orated, of course, and Mrs. McDougal was irrepres-

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sible, but without them it would have been solemn—*solemn!* I tried not to talk too much. Men don't like it; they like women to listen to them, but to-night they—"

"Like sheep before their shearer, were dumb—as I'll be dead if you don't sit down. Sit down!"

"I can't." And Miss Gibbie was waltzed around once more. "I don't understand, but it's going to be all right. Men are certainly funny. For weeks every member of the council has pooh-hooded me, thought my audaciousness was outrageousness, shook their heads and waved me out, and didn't begin to listen seriously until a week ago. To-night they were little lambs!"

"If you'll stop butting round like a goat and go to bed I'll hear about these lambkins to-morrow. I sat up to tell you good-night, not to hear you talk. It's nearly twelve o'clock. Of course they came round! Wind-watchers, all of them! That 3 per cent. got them. I told you if you made it 4 it wouldn't go through."

"Some one wanted to know who Mr. Black was, and Mr. Billisoly asked if your name was on the tax-payers' petition. It's like a play with the principal character left out. Suppose—"

"Suppose nothing! Go to bed and go to sleep! Your eyes are as big as saucers, blue saucers at that. I don't want to hear another word," and with a kiss as quick as the look that swept the flushed face

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was scrutinizing, Miss Gibbie waved her to the door.

"But aren't you coming? It's nearly twelve o'clock!"

"And why do I live alone save to do as I please? No, I'm not coming. Go to bed!"

At the door, hand on knob, Mary Cary turned. "How did Mr. Milligan know about my English grandfather? Who told him he was a chief justice?"

"I did. And for good reasons. I don't tell my reasons. Go to bed!"

"When did you tell him?"

"This morning after I left you. *Are* you going to bed?"

"I don't see what you told him for. I don't like my grandfathers. I can't imagine—"

"There are many things you can't imagine, and more you don't understand. *Go to bed!*"

In her room Mary Cary stood before the tall, old-fashioned bureau, with its small swinging glass, and brushed her hair mechanically and with thoughts afar off; then putting down her brush laid it on a letter she had not seen before.

"Why, it's John's!" she said. "I wonder how it got here?" She held it up, then put it back again. "It must have come on the last mail and Hedwig brought it in. Silly!"

She braided her hair slowly, tied on its ribbons, then knelt by the big tester bed to say her prayers.

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Her face rested sideways on the open palms of her hands, crossed one on the other, and her eyes closed sleepily.

"I'm too tired to read it to-night, and to-morrow I will be too busy. But I'm glad it's here. In case of trouble—or anything, John is such—a sure help."

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VI

MIDNIGHT

THE heat was oppressive. Miss Gibbie turned off all lights save the one on the candle-stand by the high mahogany bed, with its valance of white piqué, drew the large wing chair close to the open window and sat down in it. Over her gown she had put on a mandarin coat bought somewhere in China, and on her feet were the slippers embroidered for her by a Japanese girl she had sent to a hospital in Nagasaki.

The moon, coming out of its hiding place, for a moment poised clear and cool in a trough of gray banked by curling clouds of black, sent a thread of pale light upon the golden dragons on the coat, flashed on the slippers, and was lost in the darkness under which it darted. Miss Gibbie, watching, nodded toward it, and tapped the stool on which her feet rested with the tip of her toes.

"The moon is like one's self," she said. "Go where you will you can't get rid of it. Spooky thing, a moon. One big eye. Don't like it!"

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She lay back in her chair and rested her hands on its arms. From the garden below the night wind brought soft fragrance of lilacs and crêpe-myrtle, of bleeding-heart and wall-flower, of cowslips and candy-tuft, and as they blew in and out, like the touch of unseen hands, they stirred old memories — made that which was dead, alive again.

"You're a fool, Gibbie Gault—a fool! You are too old to care as you care; too old to take up what you've turned your back on all these years. You are too old—too old!"

Suddenly she sat up. "Too old, am I? I'll see about that! The tail end of anything isn't its valuable part, and of a life it's usually useless, but it is all I have left, and I'll be jammed if I don't do something with it. And were I a man I wouldn't say I'll be jammed. Men have so many advantages over women!"

Again she leaned back in her chair and tapped its arms with her long, slender fingers. "I wonder how long I have to live. One—five—ten years? What puppets we humans are—what puppets! Born without permission, dying when it is neither pleasant nor convenient, we are made to march or crawl through life on the edge of a precipice from which at any moment we may be knocked over. And we're told we should believe the experience is a privilege!" Both hands were lifted. "A privilege! Mary thinks

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it is, thinks parts of it very pleasant, but Mary never saw a field in which she didn't find a four-leaf clover, and I never saw one in which I did. 'Look for it,' she tells me." She shook her head. "It isn't that. The pitiful part of life is when one cares so little for what life gives!"

The tips of her fingers were brought together, then opened and shut mechanically. "And once I cared so much! Who doesn't care when they are young and wonderful things are ahead? Who doesn't care? And now to be caring again after the long, long, useless years! To be caring again!"

She closed her eyes and smiled a queer, twisted little smile. "It's got me!" she said. "Old or not, it's got me! And it's a poor life that it doesn't get! But who would have thought at your age, Gibbie Gault, you would let another life do with yours what it will? And that's what you are doing; you are letting Mary Cary do with you what she will! Well, suppose I am?" The keen gray eyes opened with a snap, and without warning stinging tears sprang in them. "Suppose I am? I've been a selfish old fool and shut out the only thing worth the having in life, and do you think now it's given me I am going to turn my back on it? In all this big world she is the only person who really loves me—the only one I really love. And do you think?"—she nodded fiercely as if to some one before her, then crumpled in a sudden heap in her chair. "Oh, God, don't

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let her go out of my life! I'm an old woman and she's all I've got! All I've got!"

For some moments she lay still, then reached out for her handkerchief. "What a variety of fools one female can be! Sit up and behave yourself, Gibbie Gault! You came near making a bargain with the Lord then, and if there's one thing more than another that must be hard for Him to have patience with it's a person who tries to make a deal with Him. 'Prosper me and I'll pay you' is the prayer of many. 'Keep evil from me; hold death back; take care of me, and I'll build a new church, send out a missionary, give my tenth and over! Don't hurt me, and I'll be good!' Who doesn't pray like that some time or other in life? Well, you came near doing it yourself. Propitiation is an instinct, and money is all some have to offer as a bribe. To love mercy, to deal justly, and to walk humbly with one's Maker are terms too hard for most of us. Much easier to dope one's conscience with money. It's the only thing I've got, money is, and there have been times when I'd have given its every dollar for the thing it couldn't get. I came near mentioning it just now!"

She wiped her eyes resentingly, rubbed her cheeks none too gently, then opened her handkerchief and smoothed it into damp folds.

"Tears! Who would believe Gibbie Gault had a tear duct?" She shook her head. "Gibbie Gault has everything every other woman has, and if she

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chooses to hide a hungry heart under a sharp tongue whose business is it? People may talk about her as much as they please, but they sha'n't feel sorry for her!" She threw her handkerchief on the table. "What idiots we are to go masquerading through life! All playing a part—all! Pretending not to care when we do care. Pretending we do when we don't. What a shabby little sham most of this thing called life is! What a shabby little sham!"

She changed her position, recrossed her feet and folded her arms. "If Mary were here she would say I needed a pill. Perhaps I need two, but not the pink ones already prepared. Everybody has a pill that's hard to swallow. *My* pill might go down easily with some, and over theirs I might not blink, but— Well, a pill is a pill; facts are facts, and old age is old age. The thing is to face what is, shake your fist at it if necessary, but never meet it, if disagreeable, half-way. I never meet anything half-way. But it's a cruel trick time plays on us, this making of body and brain a withered, wrinkled thing, whimpering for warmth and food and sleep, and babbling of the past. It's a cruel trick!"

Out on the still air the clock in St. John's church steeple struck twelve strokes with clear deliberation. From the hall below they were repeated, and from the mantel behind her the hour chimed softly. She closed her eyes. "Twelve o'clock! Time for ladies of my age to be in bed. Not going to bed! And my

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age hasn't yet reached the babbling-of-the-past stage. It will never reach that, Gibbie. Never!"

Was it a hundred or a thousand years ago that she used to sit on this same stool at her father's knees and recite Latin verbs to him, and as reward have him read her tales of breathless adventure and impossible happenings, all the more delicious because forbidden by her prosaic mother? She was seven when her mother died, but she barely remembered her, and had she lived they would hardly have been great friends. Her mother's pride was in pickles and preserves and brandy peaches; in parties where the table groaned, the servants also, and in the looking well after the ways of her household. But of a child's heart and imagination she knew little. She was a true woman, but a housekeeper had taken her place, and neither her father nor herself had been seriously affected by her death.

And what splendid comrades she and her father were after her mother left them! He would let no one teach her but himself, and how he loved to show her off to his friends, putting her on top of the dining-room table and making her recite in Latin bits from an ode of Horace, in French a fable of La Fontaine's, in English a sonnet of Shelley or extracts from Shakespeare's plays, and then letting her dance the heel-and-toe shuffle taught her secretly by the darkies on the place. What a selfish little pig she had been allowed to be! How selfish both of them had been! Their

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books a passion, travel their delight, most people but persons who bored or bothered, they had lived largely apart, come and gone as they chose, cared little for what others said or thought; and yet when the war came they were back, passionate defenders of their cause, and in their hearts hot hate for those who sought to crush it.

And then it was pride measured its lance with love, and won. The awakening of her womanhood and the mockery of life had come together, hand in hand, and henceforth she was another creature.

In her chair Miss Gibbie shivered. It was not the sudden gust of wind that caused the sudden chill, but the scent of the micrafella roses just under the window which the wind had brought; and her arms, interlocked, were pressed closer to her breast. "Gibbie Gault, what a fool you are!" she said, under her breath. "But how much bigger a fool you were nearly fifty years ago!"

Seventeen. Young, vivid, brilliant, beautiful. Yes, beautiful! Nothing is so beautiful as youth, and she had much more than youth. The gods had been good to her up to then, and then they taunted her, made spring in her heart love for one only—love that must be crushed and killed, for the man who alone could inspire it wore the hated blue, was there to fight against her people, and never must she marry him, she told herself. On a visit North she had met him, and it was a whim of fate that he

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should be captain of one of the companies taking possession of Yorkburg, with headquarters in the Roy house, next to her own. A whim of fate! Friend and foe they met daily, and battle was never waged more hotly than was theirs. On his part, determination that never yields. On hers, pride that never surrenders. And then one day there was a change of orders. His regiment was sent away and to battle. Lest the horror, the terror of it all undo her, she had bid him go, refused to promise in the years to come she would ever be his wife, and the look on his fine, brave face had followed her through life.

A month later he was brought back and by her order to her house. Fatally wounded, in delirium her name was ever on his lips, but in his eyes blankness. And on her knees by his bed she had twisted in an agony of prayer that for one moment, but one moment, light might come into them that she might pray for pardon ere he died. But no light came and he died, not knowing that for her love, too, was dead.

Again Miss Gibbie stirred, for again she seemed to see herself. This time she was by an open grave. White, rigid, erect, she watched with tearless eyes the lowering, not of a mere body in the ground, but the burying of all youth has the right to ask of life. Out of the future were gone for her the dreams of girlhood and a woman's hopes. The bareness and emptiness of coming years froze the blood in her

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heart, and when she turned away she lifted her head and bid life do its worst. Nothing could matter now.

Darker than the days of battle were the days of peace, and she made her father close the house and go away. For years they wandered where they would, but always were back for the month of June; and no one remembered that the twenty-first was the date of Colleen McMasters's death, or knew that on that day his grave was visited, and there alone a woman yielded to the memories that ever filled her heart.

When her father died life in Yorkburg was impossible. With a tilt of her chin at its dulness, a wave of her hand at its narrowness, and eyes closed to its happy content, she had gone back to London and re-opened the house which had become known for her sharp wit, her freedom of speech, and her disregard of persons who had for commendation but inherited position; and there for years had what she called headquarters, but never thought of or spoke of as home.

She pulled her chair closer to the window and, with elbows on its sill and chin on her crossed hands, looked out into the soft silence of the night.

"What a time for seeing clearly, seeing things just as they are, this midnight is, Gibbie Gault! In the darkness wasted time stares you in the face and facts refuse to turn their backs. And you thought once

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the waste was all the other way—thought you were wise to stand off and watch the little comedies and tragedies, the pitiful strivings for place and power, the sordid struggles for bread and meat, the stupid ones for cap and bells! The motives and masques, the small deceptions and the large hypocrisies of life interested you immensely, didn't they? Take the truth out and face it. You tell other people the truth—tell it to yourself! A selfish old pig, that's what you were, and thinking yourself clever all the while. Clever! And why? Because all your life you have been a student of history, of human happenings, and of man's behavior to his fellow-man, and particularly to woman, you thought you knew life, didn't you? You didn't! Because you were an evolutionist and recognized Nature's disregard of human values, the impartial manifestations of her laws, and the reckoning which their violation demands, you thought science must satisfy. Science doesn't satisfy. With ignorance and superstition, with life's cruelties and injustice, with human helplessness, you could quarrel well, but beyond the sending out of checks to serve as a soothing-syrup to your encumbrance of a conscience what did you ever do to give a lift to anything? Nothing! And the pity is there are many like you!

"'Cui-bono-itis.' That's what you had, Gibbie Gault—'cui-bono-itis.' Bad thing! Almost as hard on the people about you as the 'ego-itis' of to-day.

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Pity people can't die of their own diseases instead of killing other people with them. Great pity!"

The moon was gone. Only in faint lines of light was the blackness of the sky broken, and as she looked out over the trees in the garden below, and down the street, asleep and still, the scene changed, and no longer was she in Yorkburg, but in the little village of Chenonceaux, at the Inn of Le Bon Laboureur. Her friend, Miss Rawley, of Edinborough, was with her. They were taking their coffee outdoors at a table placed where they could best get the breeze and see the roses climbing over the latticework of the little hotel, with its pots of red geraniums in the windows. And in the door the young proprietor was smiling happily, for down the long, straight, tree-lined road an automobile which had just left the château was coming, and he had visions of what it would mean.

"I didn't." She nodded her head. "It's a way life has, this bringing of somebody across our path, this taking of somebody out of it, as incidentally as if we were flies. Well, that's what I used to think most of us were. Flies! Those who weren't flies were spiders. Some buzzed, some bit, and all in a net—all! And to think of the way I was taken by the shoulders and turned around! Made to see all I'd been doing was squinting at life with my nose turned up. Just that! Because I had seen the just man perish in his righteousness, and the wicked prosper

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in his wickedness, I thought, with my ancient friend, that time and chance happeneth to all, and people and pigs had much in common. What an old fool you were, Gibbie Gault! Take your pill! You saw life as you wanted to see it, and, giving nothing to it, got nothing out of it. Right!

"Queer what a kiss can do — just one!" She drew in her breath and felt it all again. The automobile had stopped. A party of Americans had gotten out and, slowly drinking her coffee, she watched them. A man and his wife, two children, a nurse, and a young girl, twenty, perhaps. Something about her, something of glow and vividness and warmth, held her, and a faint memory was stirred. A clear, fresh voice called to the chauffeur as she sprang out of the car and came close to the table near which she was sitting, and then she heard her name spoken in joyous surprise.

"It's Miss Gibbie Gault! Oh, Aunt Katherine, it is Miss Gibbie Gault!"

Without warning, two strong young arms were thrown around her neck and on her lips a hearty kiss was pressed. "Oh, Miss Gibbie, I'm so glad to see you! *I'm so glad!* I'm Mary Cary who used to live in Yorkburg. You don't mind my kissing you, do you? I couldn't help it, I really couldn't! It's *so* good to see some one from Yorkburg!" And she was hugged again, hugged hard.

"Nearly three years ago!" Her lips quivered.

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"And a different world you've been living in since. Somebody was really glad to see you. It makes a great difference in life when some one is glad to see you!"

Was it fate, chance, circumstance that had brought the girl to her? She did not know. Once she would have said. Maybe God needed them together, was Mary's view, and she never commented on Mary's views. In that at least she had learned to hold her tongue. But it did not matter. They were here in Yorkburg, lives closely interknit, and here, in the home in which she had been born, she was to live henceforth. And if but close to her she could keep the girl who had warmed her heart and opened her eyes she would ask nothing more of life.

For two years and more they had been together. Instantly she had wanted her, and, never hesitating in efforts to get what she wanted, a month after the meeting at the little Inn of Le Bon Laboureur she invited her to be her guest in a trip around the world. The invitation was blunt. She had long wanted to take this trip, had long been looking for the proper companion. She had a dog, but he wasn't allowed to come to the table. Would she go? Her uncle and aunt would not let her miss the chance. They made her go. Doctor Alden and his wife were sensible people.

And then the night in Cairo when Mary came in her room, sat on the stool at her feet, and, crossing

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her arms on her lap, looked up in her face and said they must go home. The holiday had been long and happy, but more of it would be loss of time. And home was Yorkburg. A visit to Michigan first, long talks with her uncle and aunt, and then whatever she was to do in life was to be done in Yorkburg. There was a little money, something her uncle had invested for her when she first went to live with him, and from it a small income would enable her to live until she decided on some sort of work. She would teach, perhaps, and she would rather it would be in the little town in which she had found a home when homeless and without a friend. She was not willing to live with anybody or anywhere without work. She was anxious to be about it. When could they start?

"And of course I started. Started just when she said. Did just what she wanted and some things she didn't. Trotted on back to the old pasture-land where old sheep should graze, and here I am to stay until the call comes. Whoever thought you'd come back to Yorkburg, Gibbie Gault! Back to shabby, sleepy, satisfied old Yorkburg! Well, you're here! Mary Cary made you come. She loves it, always wanting to do something for it; helping every broken-down old thing in it; laughing at its funny ways, and keeping straight along in hers. And for what? To-morrow everybody will be talking about the meeting to-night. About other things she's doing. Small

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thanks she'll get, and if you tell her so she'll say if you do things for thanks you don't deserve them. Bless my soul, if it isn't raining!"

A sudden downpour of rain startled her, and she sat upright; then, at a noise behind, turned and saw Mary Cary coming in the door.

"Oh, Miss Gibbie, I could spank you! I really could! You aren't even five years old at times. It has turned almost cold, and raining hard, and here you are sitting by an open window!" She felt the gown of the older woman anxiously. "I believe it's damp. If you don't get in bed I'm going to—"

"Do what?" Miss Gibbie got out of her chair, threw off the mandarin coat with its golden dragons, and kicked her slippers toward the door. "What are you going to do?"

"Put you in it. Get in and let me cover you up! Are you sure you aren't cold? Sure?"

"Sure." Miss Gibbie mimicked the anxious tones of the girl now bending over and tucking the covering round her warm and tight. "What did you come in here for, anyhow? Go to bed!"

"I knew you'd left the window open, and it has turned so cool. I was afraid there was too much air." She stooped over and kissed her. "Goodnight! Don't get up to breakfast. I'll see you during the day." With a swift movement she turned off the light on the candle-stand and was gone, and

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under the covering Miss Gibbie hid her face in the pillow.

"Dear God," she said. "Dear God, she's all I've got. I'm an old woman, and she's all I've got!"

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VII

PEGGY

MUTHER say, please, sir, send her four eggs' worth of salt pork, and two eggs' worth of pepper, and five eggs' worth of molasses. And she say I can have pickle with the last egg."

The eyes which had been critically searching the pickle-jar on the counter as the eggs were carefully taken out of a basket looked confidently in Mr. Blick's face, and a red little tongue licked two red lips in quivering expectation of the salty sourness awaiting them.

"Please, sir, I'd like that one." A dirty little forefinger pointed to a long, fat cucumber lying slightly apart from its fellows. "That's the one, Mr. Blick. No, not that one—*that* one!" and the finger was pressed resolutely against the jar. "And would you please, sir, give it to me before you weigh out the things?"

"Oh, Peggy dear, what a little pig you are! The very biggest in the jar, and such a wicked-looking pickle, Peggy! Why not get an apple, instead?"

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Peggy turned joyously at the sound of the voice behind her. "Oh, Miss Mary Cary, I'm so glad it's you. I thought it was Miss Lizzie Bettie Pryor!"

Mr. Biick laughed. The relief in Peggy's voice was so unqualified that the man, standing in the door watching the little group, laughed also. Miss Cary turned toward him. "This is Peggy, John — my little friend, Peggy McDougal. Wipe your hands, Peggy, and speak to Mr. Maxwell, who has come from New York to see Yorkburg, and—and the places he used to know."

Peggy wiped her hands carefully on the handkerchief held out to her, then advanced toward the man, still standing in the doorway, but now with his hat in his hand.

"How do you do, Mr. John Maxwell from New York?" she said, gravely; in her eyes critical inspection of the face before her. "I know about you. Muther says you used to live in Yorkburg, but your muther didn't like it. I hope you like it, and will stay a long time and come again. Miss Mary Cary says it's nicer than New York."

John Maxwell took the offered hand as ceremoniously as it was given. "Thank you! I do like Yorkburg, and I hope to come again." He laughed amusedly in the upturned eyes which were searching his. "It is nicer than New York. Miss Cary is quite right."

"New York's bigger, ain't it?"

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"Yes"—hesitatingly—"some bigger. But I don't believe there's anything there like you—"

"Plenty more here like me."

"How many?"

"Hundreds, I reckon. Yorkburg's most all children and old maids, muther says. We've got nine children—four girls and five boys. The last one was a girl, which would have made us even, but it died. Billy give it a piece of watermelon rind to play with and it et it. But, Miss Mary, muther *did* say I could have a pickle, she did." And Peggy turned to Miss Cary, anxious entreaty in her eyes.

"I don't want an apple—I want a pickle. And it won't make me sick. There's seven of us to have a bite, and one bite wouldn't give anybody's stomach a pain. Oh, Miss Mary, you ain't Miss Lizzie Bettie Pryor. Please don't tell me not to get it. Please don't!" And the little fingers twisted and untwisted in tragic intensity of appeal.

"I ought to tell you." Miss Cary looked doubtfully at the pickle-jar. "But if you get it will you promise not to ask for another for a long, long time? They are almost poisonous. Mr. Blick, I wish you wouldn't keep them. They are such a temptation to the children. Isn't there anything else you could keep instead?"

"Yes'm, plenty of things. But that's all I would do. I'd keep 'em. I tell you times ain't like they was, Miss Cary, and if you don't sell what people

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want to buy, they'll buy from the man who sells what they want. And then what would Mrs. Blick and the babies do?"

Mr. Blick's bright little black eyes beamed first at Miss Cary and then at the gentleman in the door, but, neither venturing an answer, he cut off a piece of pork and wrapped it carefully. "Not being in the missionary business, I have to meet the times, for if we don't stand up we set down, and folks walk right along over us and don't know we're there. I don't approve of pickle, or cocoanut, either, as for that"—he tapped a jar filled with water, in which soaked broken pieces of the fruit of the tree forbidden by most Yorkburg mothers—"but business is business, which I ain't attendin' to or I'd be takin' your order 'stead of wastin' your time." And again the black little eyes gleamed like polished chinquapins sunk in a round red peach.

"Oh no! Peggy was here first and her mother is waiting for her. You give her what she came for while I look around for what I want."

Mr. Blick, knowing further words were unwise, began patiently to do up the eggs' worth of pork and pepper and molasses, and John Maxwell, watching him to see in what proportions they would be meted out, grew as interested as Peggy, whose shrewd little eyes had so early been trained in weights and measurements that she could tell quickly the number of eggs required for an ounce or quarter or half a

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pound of the purchase to be made. Putting the packages in a basket, she turned; then, remembering a final order, stood again at the counter.

"I forgot, Mr. Blick. Muther say won't you please send her nine of them little blue-and-red-and-white birthday candles? She wants 'em for the twins' birthday. It comes on the Fourth of July; they will be nine on the Fourth, Washington and Jefferson will, and muther's been wanting ever since they been born to celebrate their birthday, but suppin' always happened; somebody was sick, or Wash and Jeff been fightin', so she couldn't in conscience give 'em a party. But the last time 'twas her fault—she mashed her finger; so she say she thinks she'll have it now if 'n it is May 'stead of July, cause there ain't nothing the matter, and she knows there will be if she waits till the right time. She say she'll send the eggs for the candles as soon as Grandpa Duke and Miss Florence Nightingale lays 'em. She knows Mis' Blick likes their eggs best. It will take a dozen, won't it?"

John Maxwell turned toward Miss Cary, his forehead wrinkled in puzzled inquiry. "In the name of chicken-science, what is she talking about? If I oughtn't to ask, don't tell me, but—"

"It's a new world I told you you'd be finding." Mary Cary laughed, running her hand through a peck measure of black-eyed peas. "And where but in Yorkburg will eggs serve for currency?"

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"But when Grandpa Duke lays the eggs? What does she mean?"

"That the big black hen was a present from Mr. Duke, Mrs. McDougal's father, and named in honor of him. All Mrs. McDougal's hens are named—honorably named. Her roosters, also. But having few roosters and admiring many men, she bestows on her lady chickens the names of distinguished gentlemen. It's her only way of keeping in touch with great people, she says. You must know Peggy's mother. She is one of my good friends. Would you like to go to the party?"

Before he could answer: "Peggy!" she called—"Peggy, come here and tell us when the party takes place."

Peggy, package-laden, came slowly toward the door near which Miss Cary and John Maxwell were standing. The top end of the precious pickle had been bitten off, and Peggy's face, wrinkled in distorted enjoyment of its salty sourness, was endeavoring to straighten itself before making answer.

"Oh, Miss Mary Cary, *will* you come to the party? Will you? There's going to be flags and poppers and lemonade and—and a lot of things. Muther say she's been intendin' to give a party ever since she's been married, but she ain't ever had a minute to do it in. The reason she is goin' to give it to the boys is because they was born the same day the United States was. They'll be nine on the

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Fourth of July and the United States will be—" She shook her head. "I don't know how old the United States is, but muther say being born when they was, and being named for Presidents, she's bound to teach us patriotics, and a party is the best way she knows of. She'd give it to me or Teeny if our birthdays stood for anything, but they don't. I'm ten, goin' on eleven, and ain't anybody yet remembered when my birthday comes."

Peggy was red in the face and out of breath. The eagerness of her invitation had dried her throat, which needed moistening. Ducking her head, she bit off the other end of the pickle and, in an effort to swallow naturally, blinked furiously.

"That's all and no more," she said, nodding explanatorily at Miss Cary. "I always take the two ends. They're toughest, and you can chew 'em longest. The other children get the middle," and she put said middle carefully between the pork and pepper. "If you don't want me to, I won't eat another for—for how long mustn't I eat it, Miss Cary?"

"For six months." Miss Cary's voice made effort to be severe. "They will ruin you. They really will. But run along and tell your mother we are coming to the party. What time did you say it was to be?"

"I didn't say. Muther ain't said herself yet. She say out of nine you can always count on suppin' happenin' that oughtn't, specially when five is boys.

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But I reckon it will be about four o'clock, and she thinks Friday will be the day. If muther can get 'em all washed and keep the lemonade from being drunk up she will have it at four. If 'n she can't she will have it when she can. But please 'm, oh *please 'm*, be sure and come!"

She started down the street, then turned, as if suddenly remembering, and came back to the man still standing in the door, watching her with amused eyes.

"Muther will be glad to have you come, too," she said, nodding gravely, "Mr.—Mr.—what did you say your name was?"

"Maxwell." And again the hat was lifted.

"Maxwell," she repeated. "I hope you will come, too. I don't know whether muther knows you or not, but if you was Satan himself she would be glad to see you—if 'n you was a friend of Miss Mary Cary."

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VIII

PEGGY'S PARTY

"NOW, ain't I glad to see you! Come right along in and set down, unless you'd rather set out. I'm that proud to have you here I'm right light in the head, that I am!" and John Maxwell's hand was shaken heartily. "Lord, what a big man you've gone and got to be! Your dotingest grandma wouldn't have believed you would grow into good looks when you was fifteen. You were the ugliest, nicest boy I ever seen at fifteen, and look at you now! Look at you now!"

Mrs. McDougal stood off and gazed with admiring candor at the man before her, and the man, laughing good-naturedly, seated himself on the railing of the little porch and threw his hat on a chair at its far end. "If I've changed it's more than you have. Just as young and gay as ever," he said, nodding toward her, "and still a woman of sense and discrimination. Nobody but you knows I'm handsome."

"I ain't sayin' you're an Appolus Belviderus.

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You ain't. But you look like a man, and that's what many who wears pants don't. And good clothes is a powerful help to face and figger. I certainly am proud to see you. I certainly am!"

"And I certainly am glad to see you. I certainly am!" He bobbed his head in imitation of Mrs. McDougal, whose words were always emphasized by gestures, and laughed in the puzzled eyes of the girl beside her, pulling off her long gloves. "Miss Cary asked me the other day if I didn't want to know you. She didn't know you were a friend of mine before you were a friend of hers. Remember those apple-jacks I used to get from you? Bully things! Don't have anything like that in New York."

"Don't have the same kind of stomach to put 'em in, I reckon. Anything is good to boys and billy-goats, but edjicated insides is sniffy, they tell me. Set down, Mary Cary. Here, take this rockin'-chair. Ain't anything been spilt on this one, and it's the only one what ain't. I'm that thankful nothin's caught on fire that I was thinkin' of settin' down myself, but 'twon't be no use. Look-a-yonder! If that Bickles boy ain't tied a pop-cracker to Mis' Jepson's chief rooster, and right on to its comb! Hi, there! Don't you light that thing!" And Mrs. McDougal waved vigorously with her apron in the direction of a small group of stooping watchers, hands on knees and eyes eagerly intent.

The warning was too late. An explosion, a

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frantic crow from a once lordly cock, a scurry to safer quarters, jeering cheers from heartless throats, and then silence as Mrs. McDougal's waving arms were seen.

"Let me go down and see what they are doing," and Mary Cary laid gloves and parasol on the chair, unpinned her hat and put it beside them. "We were so late I was afraid the children would be gone. Look at that little rascal tying two dogs' tails together!" Down the steps she ran and across the yard, and as she approached there was a rush toward her. Instantly she was the centre of a crowding, swarming group of children, all talking at once, and all trying to see what she had come to do, but as she raised her hand there was momentary stillness.

"Now I can set down." With a sigh of relief Mrs. McDougal took the chair offered to Miss Cary, folded her arms, and began to rock, her eyes fastened on the man still on the railing of the little porch, but now with his back against a post and hands clasped over the knee of his right leg.

"I can set down in peace for a few minutes anyhow," she went on, "for as long as Miss Mary is out there things will go right. Some women is born with a way to manage children. She was." She nodded toward the yard. "Remember how she used to do those 'sylum children? Led 'em into more mischief than all the rest put together, but she always led 'em out, and they were like sheep behind her.

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Loved her. That was it. Ain't it funny the things folks will do for a person just on account of lovin' 'em? And ain't it funny how you can't love some people to save your life? You know you ought to, specially if they're kin, and you try to, but you can't do it. The very sight of some folks makes the old boy rise up in you, and you wish they was in—well, I ain't sayin' where you wish they was. My grandmother always told me you'd better keep some wishes to yourself.

"But there's one person in this town what makes me want to do to her just what Billy Bickles did to that rooster just now. She's that superior, and so twisty in the corners of her mouth, that I'm always wishin' I could fix the kind of fall her pride's goin' to have some day. Bound to have it, pride is. 'Ain't no law to hold it up any more than an apple in the air, and both of 'em is got to come down. When folks pass other folks what they know in the street, and don't any more speak to 'em than if they was worms of the dust, they think it's on account of bein' who they are, and they don't know it's on account of bein' what they is. Of course a person can't be blamed for bein' born a fool, but a fool ought to know better than to be fooler than it's bound to be. I don't mind Mrs. Deford not noticin' me, but Susie, who sells her all her hats, says—"

"Mrs. Deford?" John Maxwell, who was only half listening, and who had been watching the chil-

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dren, turned toward Mrs. McDougal. "You mean Mrs. Walter Deford?"

"That's who I mean, though I don't see what she's called Mrs. Walter Deford for, being as 'tis Mr. Walter Deford don't seem to enjoy her company any more than I do. If he's been in Yorkburg for eight years, nobody's heard of it. When she dies she oughtn't to be res'rected. In heaven there'll be saints, born plain. She couldn't associate with them. In hell there'll be blue-blooded sinners, and she can't mix with sinners. The grave's the place for her, and won't anybody round here weep when she's put in it. But Lord-a-mercy, what am I wastin' time talking about an old teapot like her for? She's hurt Susie's feelin's so often, Susie bein' like her pa, and not havin' much spirit, that I get kinder riled when her name is mentioned. But my grandmother always did say if you didn't like a person, spew them out of your heart and shut your mouth. And here I am talkin' about a nothin', 'stead of askin' you 'bout yourself. It's been a long time since I seen you. Them other times when you've been down I ain't even had a chance to glimpse you on the street, but the children told me, Susie and Hunt did, that you was a New-Yorker all right, and you is that. I tell you good clothes and an easy air don't hurt anybody." She nodded her head. "You look like where you come from."

"Any difference in New-Yorkers and other people?

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Mind my smoking?" He took a package of cigarettes out of his pocket, lighted one and put the rest back. "In New York I tell people I'm from Yorkburg. Could I have arranged it I would have been born here. Not my fault I'm not a Virginian." He laughed, knocking the ashes from his cigarette. "You've got a bunch of them. All those yours?"

She peered above the railing and counted. "Ain't but five of 'em mine. The four oldest works. Susie stays in Miss Patty Moore's millinery store, Lizzie lives with her grandpa, Hunt is at the woolen mills with his pa, and Teeny helps Mrs. Blick with the children. The youngest is twins, they're seven. The next is twins, too. They will be nine on the Fourth of July, and this was to be their party, but they got to fightin' so over who was to be invited that I had to keep 'em in bed all day yesterday, and not let it be their party at all. I told 'em 'twas Peggy's, but I'd do the invitin' myself. I didn't want that Billy Bickles, but if I hadn't asked him there'd been trouble for me as long as life. I know his ma too well. Don't reckon you ever knew Mis' Bickles? She's one of them kind of women who's always seein' she gets what's comin' to her, and takes what ain't. Her husband lives up the country. He warn't much to leave: one of them lazy, good-natured kind what always had a pain handy; and Mis' Bickles says she left him while her family was small. Mis' Bickles's got more sense than you'd think from lookin' at her, and a tongue what

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tells all it knows and makes up what it don't. It don't do to get that kind of a tongue down on you.

"Them two children over there"—she pointed vaguely toward the now shouting group—"those two with red hair and red ribbons is Mr. Sam Winter's little girls. I don't like 'em, but if there's any one woman in this world I feel sorry for it's Sam Winter's wife, and so I invited 'em. Ain't they the ugliest, freckledest little things you ever saw? Don't reckon you remember their ma, either? She used to stay in Mr. Pat Horston's bakery and confectionery when you lived here. That's been—"

"Ten years ago this October."

"That's so. I remember it now like 'twas yesterday. Never will forget the day your father died so sudden, just like Mr. Pryor, and everything in Yorkburg seemed to stop. He was the kind of man who makes wheels go round, and everybody thought when he died the shoe factory would shut down and the 'lectric-light plant would go out; and people round here say they would if you hadn't put your foot down and told your ma they had to keep up. Sixteen was right young to be buttin' into business matters, but some folks is born older than others, and I reckon you've got right much of your pa in you. And that's what I told McDougal I liked about you. You knew what you wanted, and when you made up your mind to do a thing, 'twould be death or you would win.

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And my grandmother always did say, for winning, will was worth more than anything else on earth.

"But I ain't asked you what kind of business you're in, or how you're gettin' on in it, nor how your ma is. I hope she's well. And your sister, too. They tell me she's married—"

"She is. Living in California. Got two children. Mother is very well, thank you. She's abroad just now. I'm in the law business. I get my bread out of it, but not much jam yet. You were speaking of Sam Winter's wife just now. I remember her; used to sell us cakes and pies, and so afraid she wouldn't get the change right she nearly wore her fingers out counting on them. We used to borrow a big piece of money—a dollar was big in those days—just to watch her face get red when we'd tell her the change was wrong. Little beasts! Somebody ought to have beaten us."

"That they ought. And somebody ought to beat Sam Winter every day in the week. Ain't nothing I would like better than to have a whack at him. I've often wished I was his wife for just five minutes. He'd be jelly or I one when 'twas over. Some men need lickin'. Sam's one of the kind who thinks when the Lord made woman He made her to be man's footstool when she warn't anything else he needed at the time. Certainly is funny how many people talk like they had a private telegraph-wire running right up to the throne of God, and you'd think they

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had special messages from Him from the cocksure way in which they tell you what He says and means. And specially 'bout women. The Bible is a great stand-by with some men when it comes to women. But I reckon women has brought a lot of it on themselves. They ain't had a chance to fight fair in life. Being mothers has made 'em stand a heap they wouldn't otherwise. A woman will stand most anything for her children."

John Maxwell laughed. "You are looking at me as if I didn't agree with you. I do. I know some men of the Sam Winter kind. And they always get the wrong sort of wife. Now if Sam had married you—"

"He'd be dead or different by this time. There ain't much in life to be sure of, but you can be sure of that. A woman is a human being, if she is a female, and I ain't ever seen a male creature who had any respect for a female one he could step on. And that's what poor, meek little Fanny Winter lets Sam do, and of course he takes advantage. 'Tain't in human nature for a man not to kick something every now and then what sits at his feet all the time."

"Good Lord! He doesn't beat her?" John Maxwell turned suddenly, in his eyes a queer light. "You mean he strikes her?"

Mrs. McDougal brought her chair closer to the railing. "I don't believe those children are ever goin' home. Some come at three, and it's after seven.

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They've et up all there was to eat, and drunk a wash-tub full of lemonade, but that Bickles boy and Fuzzy Toone and Mineola Hodgkins will stay till next week if I don't make 'em go. I believe the little Winters is gone. Look at Peggy! Ain't she havin' a grand time? I'm glad you and Miss Mary didn't come till the first rush-round was over. There's been twenty-one of 'em here includin' of my five, and I tell you when you get through feedin' and fillin' of twenty-one hollow stomachs you're ready for rest. How many out there now?"

"Eleven. Let me see." John counted again. "No, ten. Miss Cary makes the eleventh. I believe she's going to tell them a story. They're getting ready to sit down under your mulberry-tree. Yes, that's what they're going to do. Let them alone. They're having a good time."

"And so am I. Certainly am enjoyin' of myself hearin' all about you. I tell you the mother of nine don't often have time to set down and rock in daylight, and at night I'm so tired that if 'twasn't for the basin of cold water I keep on the back porch to put my face in I'd go to sleep before I'd read a page."

A fresh cigarette was lighted. "Like to read? Why didn't you tell me? Got a lot of books I don't know what to do with. Will send them down if you want them—"

"Want them?" Mrs. McDougal sat upright, hands up also. "It's the sin of my life, readin' is.

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But it's saved me from losin' my mind. When a person gets up at five o'clock three hundred and sixty-five days in the year, except Sundays, when it's six; cooks, washes dishes, cleans, sews, cooks, washes dishes, sews, cooks, washes dishes, and in between times scrambles round doin' dozens of odd jobs that don't count, life ain't true poetry, and if 'twarn't for risin' out the world I live in and gettin' into a book one at night I'd gone crazy long before this. Makes my mouth water just to think of havin' some books of my own. All I read is borrowed, and I have to hide 'em under the mattress to keep the children from gettin' 'em dirty. I thank you hearty, Mr. John; I certainly do."

John Maxwell took a note-book and pencil out of his pocket. "I've a good forgettery and if I don't put that down you'd have to write, perhaps. How about Mr. McDougal? What kind does he like?"

Mrs. McDougal's jolly laugh reached to the mulberry-tree and the children looked up. "Books! McDougal!" Her hands came down on her knees with a resounding smack. "If McDougal has read a book since I've been married to him he's done it in the dark. Books ain't his line. He's a good man, McDougal is, but you couldn't call him lit'rary. You see"—she settled herself back in her chair and again folded her arms—"he hasn't got what you might say was imaginations. He can't understand why some days I'd so much rather use the axe on the kitchen

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stove than in the wood-house, or why the sight of a dish-pan makes me sick in my stomach. As for my chickens—calling hens and roosters by names of big people is tommy-rot to him, and he don't any more know my longin's for a look at high life and for people who use elegant language and paint pictures and play the pianer than I understand how he can live in a tea-cup and not smash it. He's one of the kind what believes you ought to stay where you're put, but in my opinion them what believes that, as a rule, ain't got sense or hustle enough to get out. I'm not sayin' McDougal is lazy or lackin', but his own ma couldn't think he had a brain that was lively. He ain't got it. Did you ever see a mule goin' round a cider mill? That's McDougal. In the daytime he's as given to silence as I am to talk, but couldn't anybody beat him snorin'. Sometimes I think the roof has gone."

John Maxwell coughed. The smoke from the cigarette had gone the wrong way and his eyes were watery.

"But he's a good man, McDougal is," his wife continued, "and everything he makes he hands over to me. A woman couldn't ask a man to do more than that, even if she'd like a little more to be handed. But we ain't never had no quarrels about money. Some men is so cussin' mean about money, and some women is so cussin' onreasonable in demandin' of it, that it's caused more trouble between

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husbands and wives than any one thing on earth, I believe. No, we ain't ever had no words that way. But I know a lot what has. Sam Winter is one of them kind of men who thinks a woman don't need to know the color of cash. When he married his wife you'd think he'd bought her by the pound. She's his. He gives her what he feels like, and his feelin's are few. What'd you ask me about her just now? Did he strike her? No, he don't strike her, not with his fists, but there ain't a day he don't hurt her some way. It don't do to have too tender feelin's, and there ain't much show for a woman born meek and humble. A man can't stand it. I don't blame him much. Nothin' is so wearin' on you as humbleness. Good gracious, if it ain't strikin' seven o'clock!"

She got up, pushed her chair back and started down the steps. "Excuse me, Mr. John, but if I don't send them children home they'll stay to supper. That they will. I'll be back in a moment."

It was ten minutes before she came, and John Maxwell, who had changed his seat and was now on the upper step of the little porch, rose as she and Miss Cary, followed by the five children, approached, and held out his hand.

"Hello, Peggy! Had a good time? Much obliged to you for inviting me. Sorry I missed the fireworks. Miss Cary's fault. She was an hour late."

Peggy shook hands and also her head. "Miss Mary ain't never late. 'Twas you, I reckon. We've

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had a grand time. Wash and Jeff drank thirteen glasses of lemonade apiece. I counted. Mineola and me didn't drink but five. We couldn't." She turned to her mother. "You sit down, muther; I'll fix supper. Good-bye, Mr. Maxwell. Good-bye, Miss Mary. That was a beautiful story you told, but I don't believe it. There ain't fairies sure 'nough." And marshalling the boys before her she disappeared in the little hall and closed the door behind her.

Mary Cary put on her hat, wiped her face, and handed John her gloves. "Put them in your pocket; it's too warm to wear them." She turned to the woman beside her and laid her hand on her shoulder. "It's been a fine party, Mrs. McDougal. The children had a lovely time and certainly did behave nicely."

"Lor', Miss Mary, you didn't see 'em. Half was gone when you got here. The hour to come was four, but some come by three. Becky Koontz says she always goes early to a party, 'cause if you don't there's just scraps, and she don't like leavin's. I did all the invitin', and when I thought out who I'd ask I felt downright fashionable. That I did. Ain't a child been here this evenin' that I care shucks for, 'cept two; and they tell me that's the way they do now in high society. You don't ask the folks you like or really want, but the folks what's asked you or you think 'twould sound nice to have. I ain't fa-

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miliar with high life, but you have to do a heap of things for peace and politics, and Milltown and King Street does pretty much the same things in different ways, I reckon. If there's anybody in this town I ain't got any use for it's Mis' Feckles, but Mr. Feckles is my boy's boss, and if her children hadn't been invited she'd never let up till she got even. Some women is like that. And there was that frisky little Mary Lou Simmons. She's a limb of the law, Mary Lou is, and my hands just itch to spank her. But I had to invite her. Her mother invited Peggy to her party, and her mother's right smart of a devil when she gets mad with you. But I certainly am sorry you've got to go. It takes me back to old times to see you, Mr. John. And what a shakin' up there's been since you young people lived here ten years ago! Funny you ain't either one married. I don't blame you. There's a heap to be said both ways, and times when you'd wish you hadn't, no matter which one you went. Good-bye. I certainly have enjoyed hearin' of you talk. Come again. Good-bye." And as long as they could be seen Mrs. McDougal's arm was waving up and down at the backs of the unthinking couple, who forgot to turn and wave in reply.

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IX

JOHN MAXWELL AND MARY CARY

"SHE'S had a good time all right." John Maxwell turned to the girl beside him and laughed in the face which looked into his and laughed also. "I never even tried as much as a sentence. She *must* have some sort of an automatic arrangement somewhere inside of her. Does she never run down, never stop talking?"

"Never." Mary Cary was looking ahead at the windows of a large building some distance away. "But she's a dear all the same, and does the work of four people every day of her life. She hasn't, as she says, an educated tongue, but her understanding of human nature is greater than mine or yours is ever likely to be. And she doesn't mind saying what other people think. I like her." She stood still. "Did you ever see such an improvement in a place as there has been in the woolen mills in the past year? Every window, back, front, and sides, has its box of flowers, and the grounds are downright pretty. I know you thought it was nonsense when

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I asked you to put flower-boxes in the shoe factory's windows, but you don't know what a help it's been to the hands. Their pride is as great as their pleasure, and since the prize of fifty dollars was offered for the best general showing the rivalry is threatening to give trouble."

"Of course it is, and then there'll be a strike. But they do look better, both buildings." And John Maxwell looked critically first at the large and now rather shabby factory of which he was the owner, and then at the newer woolen mills of which Mr. Moon was president.

"I suppose I did think it was nonsense, putting flower-boxes in factory windows, but if the people like them I'm glad they're there. It must be rather dreary pegging away on leather six days in the week, and if the flowers help, certainly it's a pretty way of helping. But a man wouldn't have thought of it. As a suggester a woman might get a steady job. How did you make Mr. Moon go in?"

"Sarah Sue made him. Solemn, sensible Sarah Sue told him it was his duty. You don't know what a help she is. We were born the same year, but she's ages older than I am. And the flowers were just the beginning. They were andirons, you know, and now the factories are so much cleaner. Each has a rest-room, and something we call a dining-room, where coffee and sandwiches and soup are served every day at cost, just a few pennies for each

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person. Some of these times we hope there is going to be a real dining-room and kitchen in all the factories, but of course everything can't be done at once. Don't go that way." She put her hand lightly on his arm. "I want to stop a moment at Mr. Bailley's and leave him this book. He was paralyzed last week."

The book was left and again they started up the long, partly paved street, never called by a name, which separated Milltown from Yorkburg, or the silks from the calicoes, as Mrs. McDougal put it, and soon were on King Street. The asylum, where the early years of Mary Cary's life had been spent, stood out clearly against the soft dusk of twilight, and the street, now quite deserted, stretched in a straight tree-bordered line as far as the eye could see. The usual chatter of neighbors on each other's porches was nowhere heard, for the hour was that of supper, but through the open doors and windows came the high notes of children's voices and an occasional clatter of knives and forks.

The sun, which had sunk in a bed of golden glory, had left behind a sky of shifting purple and orange and pink, and, as the colors were absorbed, grew warmer, fainter, widened, narrowed, and were lost, the glow of the dying day faded, and out of the soft grayness one by one the stars appeared.

Walking slowly and more slowly, and all unconscious of their lingering steps, John Maxwell and

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Mary Cary watched in silence the changes in the sky; noted the soft green of trees and grass, the blossoming of old-fashioned flowers in gardens of another day, reached out hands to pull a spray of bridal wreath or yellow jessamine, and as they neared the asylum both stopped, though why they hardly knew themselves.

"Study hour," said Mary Cary, explanatorily. "Poor little things! Of course I am very impractical, and I would never do for the head of anything, because I have such queer ideas, especially about children. But I don't believe they will ever learn anything in a book that would do them as much good as a beautiful sunset. And yet they're shut up in the house on an evening like this studying something about the sun, perhaps, and not allowed to see its glories and wonders, because it sets at an hour that is set apart for something else. Sometimes"—she pulled a bit of bridal wreath to pieces and threw its petals on the ground—"sometimes I wonder if more harm isn't done by too much system than by too little."

"Doubtless it is." John Maxwell smiled, though in his eyes were other thoughts than those which were filling hers. "But there's been a big change in this place since you were here. That wing was a great improvement. Looks now pretty much like a big home instead of a place for herding humans, as it once looked. How I used to hate it!"

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"Hate it?" They had resumed their walk and she looked up. "I don't see what you hated it for."

"Don't you?" He took out his handkerchief and wiped his face, and as he put it back in his pocket he looked in her questioning eyes.

"It was because you were in it and I couldn't take you out."

She shook her head. "It was well you couldn't. You wouldn't have known what to do with me, and—"

"I knew what I wanted to do. I wanted mother to send you to the finest school in the country, get you beautiful clothes, and give you everything you wanted until I could marry you. Then I was going to pay her back."

"What a silly boy!" She laughed, but she did not look at him. They had turned the corner and were now at the end of the asylum yard, enclosed by its high wooden fence, and as they started to go down the street which would lead into the road to Tree Hill she laid her hand again on his arm.

"Wait a minute." Her foot was against a certain paling, and with her heel she made a hole in the ground. "Do you remember this?"

"Of course I do." Sudden color filled his face. "You used to put your apple there. Every time I came for it my heart nearly jumped in the hole you hid it in, I was so afraid I'd be seen and would have

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to stop coming. I never ate one of those apples. I couldn't."

"I don't see why you didn't. They were awfully nice apples. I loved them."

"I know you did." He looked straight ahead. "That's why I couldn't eat yours. It used to make me so fighting furious to think—to think things were like they were that every night I'd throw rocks at the brick wall in front of the house for half an hour before I went home. Did you know the first time I ever saw you you were hanging over that wall? It was on a Sunday afternoon and I asked the boy with me what was your name. From that Sunday to the week you went away I never missed going to Sunday-school. Mother couldn't understand it. She didn't know you were compelled to be there. That's the one bit of system I approved of in your institution.

"I don't remember whether it was on the next Sunday after I saw you looking over the wall that I made up my mind I was going to marry you, or the Sunday after, but it was one or the other. That was over ten years ago, and—"

"We ought to be home this minute." She started down the half-dark street. "I'm not going to listen to things like that. Besides, it's after supper-time and Hedwig will be tired of waiting. You walk so slow, John!"

"All right." He joined her and together they

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turned into the Calverton road, up which at the top of the hill was the home now her own. "If you don't want to hear me I'll wait until later." He smiled in the half-frowning face. "You are tired, aren't you, of my asking when you are going to marry me? I'm perfectly willing to stop, but not until you tell me."

"Do you think I'd marry anybody for years and *years* and YEARS?" She rolled the "years" out with increasing emphasis on each. "I have just begun to really live here — to start some things; to get used to having a home of my own; to knowing all the people. And then"—she looked in his face, indignant protest in her eyes—"there's Miss Gibbie. Do you think I would go away and leave her like this?"

"It is asking a good deal, I know." Out of his voice had dropped all lightness and in it were quiet purpose and gravity. "And in asking it I may seem selfish, yet I do ask it. For ten years I have had but one thought, one hope, one dream, if you will. It took me through college that I might please you; made me settle down to work at once when through with study; made me hold all my property interests here because I knew you loved the place. But not until two years ago did I ask you to marry me."

"What did you ask me for then?" she interrupted, pulling a branch of a mock-orange bush on the side of the road and stripping it of its leaves. "We are such good friends, John, you and I. We have always

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been, and I don't want you to marry anybody—not even me." She turned to him, but she did not hear his quick, indrawing breath. "I need you too much, John. You always know the things I don't, and you unravel all the knots and straighten all the twisted strings when I get mixed up, but if we got married it wouldn't be the same at all."

"Why wouldn't it?"

"It wouldn't." She shook her head. "I'd be thinking just about you, and that—"

"Wouldn't be bad for me." His steady eyes looked into her unawakened ones. "I should ask nothing more of life."

"But life would ask something more of me. Don't you see it would be just selfishness. Mary mightn't mind"—her forehead puckered—"Mary always was self-indulgent, and if Martha didn't watch her—" She threw the stripped twig away impetuously. "I am not going to get married, I'm not. I don't see why men always tag love in. Just as soon as I get to be real friends with a man and like him just—just as he is, he turns round and spoils it! Why can't they let love alone?"

"Love will not let them alone, I imagine." He looked down on her, frowning slightly, in his eyes sudden pain as of fear for her.

"You are such a child, Mary. Many things you can be serious about. Love alone you treat lightly. I don't understand you."

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"And I don't understand love—the kind you mean. And if it is going to make me as cross and huffy and injured as it seems to do some people I don't want to know. I thought love was the happiest thing in life."

"It is. Or the unhappiest."

She turned. The note in his voice was new. Bitterness did not belong to John.

"Are you going to do like that, too, and—be like the rest? Why can't we keep on in the old way, John, and be as we've been so long? We were happy and—"

"Because I can't go on in the old way and be happy. I want you with me. I need you. And you—you need me, Mary. You are so alone here, except for Miss Gibbie, and you know so little of—of so many things in life. When are you going to be my wife?"

"I really—do—not—know!" With each word was a nod. "I am too busy to get married. I don't want a husband yet. He'd be so in the way." She looked at him, eyebrows slightly raised. "I don't think that expression on your face suits you. And if I've got to look at it all through supper it won't make things taste very nice. That is one of the troubles about getting married. The foot of the table could be so unpleasant!"

With a half frown, half sigh, he turned his head away. "I wonder if you will ever grow up? And I

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wonder, also, if in all your thought for others you will ever think of me?"

He stood aside that she might pass between the vine-covered pillars marking the entrance to Tree Hill, and looking ahead saw Hedwig standing in the porch.

"There is your friend faithful," he said, and his face cleared.

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X

THE FORGOTTEN ENGAGEMENT

EN minutes later they were at the table and again alone. Hedwig had left them, and John, leaning forward, held out his glass.

"More tea and less ice, please," he said, nodding between the candles and over the bowl of lilacs to the girl at the head of the table. "I don't see why women put so much ice in these queer-shaped glasses, anyhow. All ice and no tea makes—"

The glass he had handed her came down with a crash, and Mary Cary's hands were beaten together in sudden excited dismay.

"Oh, my goodness! Guess what we've done—*guess* what we've done!" she repeated over and over, and now it was her elbows with which the table was thumped. "It is your fault, John! You know I haven't a bit of memory about some things, and you ought to have reminded me! I told you not to let me forget! You know I told you!"

"In the name of thunderation!" John Maxwell

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put down his fork and pushed back his chair. "Is it hydrophobia or hysterics or brain trouble or—For the love of mercy—"

"What time is it? Do you suppose we have time to go now, or is it too late? Why *did* you let me forget?" And now, standing up, Mary Cary looked despairingly first at John and then at the clock, at sight of which she sank back limply in her chair.

"Would you mind telling me what crime we've committed?" John got up and filled his glass with tea.

"It's worse than a crime. It's a discourtesy. Anybody might forgive any sort of sin, but nobody forgives rudeness. The council meeting will be nothing to this."

"But what have we done?" John, still standing, put one, two, three lumps of sugar in his tea. "I thought you were having a fit, and convulsions were going to follow. You scared me silly. What's the fuss about?"

She leaned forward dejectedly, elbows on the table, then put her hand over the sugar-bowl. "You can't have four lumps! You know sweet things don't suit you. We were to take tea with Mrs. Deford to-night. You knew we were, and you didn't remind me. Sit down. You haven't a bit of manners."

"Good heavens! Is that what you've been making all this row about? I thought something was the

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matter." He put down the sugar-tongs, went back to his seat, and took out his watch. "Quarter-past eight. What time were we to be there?"

"Seven o'clock. Everybody has supper at seven o'clock in Yorkburg."

"Too late now." He put his watch back and helped himself to another piece of fried chicken. "Terrible in you to forget such a thing as that! Terrible! But I'm much obliged to you for doing it. I was so afraid you'd remember, I—"

Her hands dropped on the table and she half rose. "Didn't you forget, too? John Maxwell, do you mean—"

"I do. These certainly are good rolls." He broke one open and let the steam escape. "Mrs. McDougal and I have much the same opinion of Mrs. Deford, and what's the use of taking tea with people you don't like? No, I didn't forget, and if you'd remembered and made me go, I'd gone. As you didn't, I took the part of wisdom and opened not my mouth. Your lack of memory is excuse enough for both. Can I have some more tea? These glasses are frauds. I'm not going to have glasses this shape when I get married."

"Indeed you are! I like this shape. I mean when I get married I'm always going to use this kind." She put the glass down. "I'm not going to give you another drop. You didn't forget and you didn't remind me. Don't you know what it is going to

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mean? To-morrow everybody in town will be told of my rude behavior—and the asylum will be blamed for it. Everything I do wrong socially is attributed to my childhood's lack of opportunities for knowing enough, and everything I do wrong in every other way is due to my later opportunities for knowing too much. Mrs. Deford doesn't like me, anyhow, doesn't approve of me, and this will end us."

"That won't be bad for you. Do you like Mrs. Deford?"

"No, I don't. I don't exactly know why, either. I see very little of her, and she is polite enough. Too polite. She doesn't ring right."

"Then what did you accept her invitation to tea for?" He put out his hand to bring back the plate Hedwig was removing. "What have I done that my supper should be taken from me? I'm not through."

"There some salad is now, sir." And Hedwig looked helplessly first at the head and then at the foot of the table.

"Oh, all right." He waved her away. "I just didn't want to be held up." He put his elbows on the table, and his chin on the back of his hands and looked at the girl in front, whose eyes were fastened indignantly on him. "If you don't like her why did you accept her invitation?"

"If that isn't Adamic! Why did *I* accept her invitation? I didn't until you had done so first. You

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said you'd come with pleasure. I thought you meant it. You were almost gushing."

"And you were almost crushing. You were so indifferent I tried to be polite enough for two. When a woman hits you in the face with an invitation you don't expect a man to run, do you? I always accept, but never go if I can manage to stay away. And I generally manage. It is purely automatic, written or spoken, this 'Thank you so much. I will come with pleasure.' Some people would say it in their sleep if waked suddenly."

"Some people mean it."

"I know they do. It takes little to give some people pleasure. Parties and picnics and teas, and even dinners, with the wrong sort of mixtures, are the breath of life to certain types. But I am like you, I don't like Mrs. Deford. She is a friend of mother's and visits her at the blink of an eye. I always have business out of the city when she is at the house. She puts her head on the side when she talks. I can stand almost any kind of woman but that kind. She's got a tongue, too, like Mrs. McDougal's friend, one that tells all it knows and makes up what it doesn't. Why aren't you eating your salad?"

She pushed back her plate and reached for an olive from a dish near the bowl of lilacs. "I don't want it. I don't like asparagus."

"Then what in the name of heaven did you have it for?"

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"You like it. Do you mean Mrs. Deford doesn't tell the truth?"

"That's what I mean. And she's got a bad memory. Great drawback to a good liar."

Mary Cary sat suddenly upright, her eyes like big turquoises, staring unbelievingly at him.

"And you were going to take supper with her to-night; going to sit at the table with some one you knew was untruthful? Wanted me to go—"

"My dear Mary—" He turned to Hedwig, who was bringing in a bowl of raspberries. "Will you please get me some tea from the pantry, Hedwig? Your mistress is very stingy with tea. Bring it in a pitcher, will you? I have only a glass thimble to put it in, and it's more convenient to have the pitcher by my own side. What were we talking about? Was I going to sit at the table with some one I knew was untruthful? If I didn't I'd eat alone pretty often. You may be a learned lady in many things, Miss Cary, but you still have many things to learn. One is the infinite variety of liars there are in life and the many assortments in which lies may be labelled.

"My grievance against Mrs. Deford isn't merely that she is an—exaggerater, let us say, but she's such a lover of lucre, clean or not. She can smell money on the way, and the chance of any one's getting it is sufficient cause for her cultivation of friendship. You don't want to know her. It's better to be polite

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to her, but she's a good kind to let alone." He looked at his watch. "Nine o'clock. Well, something has got to be done. What's the best fairy-tale to make up?"

"I'm not going to make up a fairy-tale." Mary Cary rose from the table, and John Maxwell, pushing her chair aside, stood waiting for her to lead the way to the library. "I'm going to write her a note to-morrow and tell her we forgot. I didn't want to go, but I hate bad manners. She just asked me because—"

"She knew I wouldn't come without you? She's got more sense than I thought. But don't be silly—there are few times in life when an untruth is justified, but many times when you don't have to tell all you know. What's to-night, anyhow?"

"Friday."

"Are you sure she didn't say Saturday night? Sure she said Friday? Now I think of it, seems to me there was something about Saturday. And was it seven or eight o'clock? If we will just say, 'Friday or Saturday?' 'Friday or Saturday?' 'Seven or eight?' 'Seven or eight?' over and over some forty or so times, we won't know what she said, and we can ask her to be certain. I'm going to ask her now. Where's your telephone?"

He rang up before she could protest.

"Hello! that Mrs. Deford?" she heard him say, and as he waved his right hand at her, the left hold-

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ing the receiver, she dropped into a chair some little distance off and waited for what was to come.

"How are you, Mrs. Deford? This is John Maxwell. Miss Cary and I are having an argument as to your invitation to supper. Is it eight o'clock to-morrow night? She says seven o'clock is the—what? What's that? *To-night?* Good gracious! You say *to-night* was the night and you waited an hour? In the name— Well, we must be crazy! We've been talking for the last thirty minutes about our engagement with you, and I wasn't sure of the hour. What's that? I don't wonder you're mad. It is inexcusable, but it was my fault. I'm entirely to blame, and Miss Cary will be distressed to death to hear of our bad behavior. You know how particular she is about things of this kind and never breaks an engagement. You are going to forgive us, aren't you? Put it all on me. It was my fault entirely. When am I going home? Possibly to-morrow, though I'm not sure. Looking for a telegram. What? Oh, sure I am. Will certainly see you before I go. It's awfully good of you to forgive us. Good-night. Oh yes, of course. Good-night."

He hung up the receiver and wiped his hands. "What's the matter with that? A microscope couldn't find a microbe of untruth in it. By this time to-morrow night she'll be all right."

Together they walked out on the porch, and in the

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damp night air Mary shivered slightly, and John turned back into the hall for half a moment.

"It is too cool out here for you with that thin dress on," he said, putting around her a long warm cape of some soft white material. "Here, take this chair and lean back in it good. Are you tired? Too tired for me to stay? I'll go if you want me to."

His penetrating eyes searched her face with sudden anxiety. It was the thing he was always watching, this look that told of spent energy. There was no fleeting shadow or hint of weariness he was not quick to understand, and to keep his strong arms at his side meant control of which she was as unconscious as a child.

"Of course I'm not tired." She lay back in the chair and put her feet on the stool he had placed for her, drawing the cape over her shoulders, but leaving her throat open. "And smoke, please. You'll be so miserable if you don't. What did she say? Was she mad?"

John took a seat on the top step of the porch, lighted his cigar, leaned back against the post, and laughed in the face opposite his.

"Mad? Hot as a hornet. But she'll cool off. We've been walloped all right, though. Could tell by her voice. What a blessed provision of nature our ears can't catch the things people say about us. I hope our ears will never be Marconi-ized. No two

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human beings would be on speaking terms if they were, except you and me."

She leaned forward as if something had just occurred to her. "John, have you heard from Mr. Van Orm as to when he can begin the surveying of the streets?"

"Yes, I have, but subjects don't *have* to be changed with a popgun." He blew out a puff of smoke and watched its soft spirals curl upward. "I had a letter from him this week. He will send down two men the first of July."

"Isn't he coming himself?"

"Is he?" John smoked in silence, looking ahead rather than at the girl beside him, and out of his face went all laughter and over it a frown swept quickly.

"I don't know. I wish he was. The Traffords say he is one of the very best civil engineers in the country, and Yorkburg doesn't at all understand how fortunate it is to have his men resurvey the town and get things in shape for the curbing and paving, and planting of trees. I am so glad he was willing to let them do it. I think it was very nice in him."

No answer. John's eyes were straight ahead. Looking up, she saw his face and suddenly understood. For half a moment she watched him, chin down, eyes up; then she leaned back and her fingers interlaced.

"Everybody says he is such a fine man."

No answer.

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"He is certainly doing splendid work. His name is at the very head of his profession, and he'll be rich some day."

"Rich now."

"Do you think"—elbows on knees and chin in the palms of her hands, she leaned toward him—"do you think Mr. Van Orm would be a nice man for a girl to marry?"

"I do not."

"I don't, either. I am so glad you think as I do." She gave a great sigh, and he looked up quickly.

"You mean—"

"I mean I would just as soon marry a cash-register. If he hadn't told you himself I wouldn't speak of it, but I'd be crazy in a week if I had to live in the house with a man like that. A straight line is crooked to him and a plummet much more apt to go wrong. I never could understand how such a correct person could have imagined he wanted to—"

"Marry you? He still expects to. He's the most conceited ass in the country. He can't take it in that you won't change your mind. Thinks it's because you are young that you aren't willing to marry yet. Told me so last month."

He looked toward her, then threw his cigar away. "I have thought a great deal about the kind of man you ought to have for a husband, Mary, but I've never seen one good enough and never but one I'd be willing for you to marry."

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"Who is that?"

"John Maxwell."

"That was very easy. Serves me right for not thinking about what I was asking." She got up. "I am tired. Please go home. And bring me to-morrow those plans of Hay & Hammond for the high-school, will you? I like theirs best, though of course a committee is to decide." She held out her hand. "Good-night."

He took it. "What terrible manners you have, Mary." Again he looked searchingly in her face, and again put the cape around her, picking it up from the floor, where it had fallen from her shoulders. "Are you very tired? You've done too much to-day. What time must I come to-morrow?"

"I don't know. Telephone about ten and see if I am ready for you." She pressed the button, and, as Hedwig appeared, turned to her.

"Keep the light in the porch until Mr. Maxwell gets to the gate. Good-night, John," and with a nod she turned and left him.

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XI

A DAY OF ENTERTAINMENT

MISS GIBBIE pressed the bell on her writing-table four times. Four rings were for the cook. They were rarely sounded, and therefore caused not only sudden cessation of work in the kitchen, but instant speculation as to what was wanted and what was wrong. Hearing them now, Tildy reached hastily for her clean apron and hurried up-stairs.

Ordinarily orders for the kitchen came through Miss Jane, the housekeeper, whose mother before her had kept the keys of the Gault house from the day of Mrs. Gault's death to her own. When a direct order was given, or direct questions were asked, by Miss Gibbie, there were reasons for it which usually served for conversational material in the servants' quarters later on.

Tildy stood before her mistress, hands clasped in front under her full blue-and-white check gingham apron, and feet wide apart.

"How you do this mornin', Miss Gibbie?" she asked, curtseying in a manner known only to herself.

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"I ain't seen how you was for mos' a month, and I certainly is glad to look on you for myself; I certainly is. That lazy nigger Ceely is gittin' so airy and set up, 'count o' bein' parlor-maid, that she thinks it's belowerin' of herself to talk to the kitchen about how things up-stairs is, less'n we have company, and I don't ax her nothin', that I don't. I hope you's feelin' as peart as a young duck after a good rain, this mornin'. You look like it. Ain't never seen anybody wear better than you do, that I ain't!" And Tildy looked admiringly at the lady before her.

"And there never was anybody who could waste words like you do. If you don't stop eating all that sweet stuff they tell me you live on you'll be dead before you're ready for judgment, and too fat to get through gates of any kind. I want to know about the things for lunch. Is your part all right?"

"Yes, ma'am! And the only things fittin' to eat, cordin' to my thinkin', is what's been made right here. All that truck what's come from Washington is just slops, and, if you mark me, you'll be dead if it's et. I got too much respect for my insides to put things in me what looks like them things Miss Jane's been unwrappin' all the mornin'. And I tell you right now, Miss Gibbie, you better not be puttin' of 'em in you. They's flauntin' plum in the face of Providence. My stomach—"

"Is not to have a taste. And mine can take care of itself. I sent for you to tell you I want vegetable

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soup for dinner to-night, thick and greasy. The fish must be cold and no sauce, the goose half done, ham raw, vegetables unseasoned, rice pudding with no sugar, bread burnt, and coffee weak as water. If you see that this is done I will give you five dollars to-morrow. If anything is fit to eat you don't get a cent."

"Jehosaphat hisself!" Tildy's hands went up under the apron and the latter fell backward over her head. For a moment she rocked, then threw the apron off her face and dropped in a chair opposite Miss Gibbie, head protruding terrapin-wise, and eyes bulging.

"Now what in the name of—"

Miss Gibbie nodded toward her. "Did you understand what I said?"

"Yes, ma'am, I understand. That is, I heared it." Tildy's head was shaken from side to side. "But 'tain't Gault doin's to put high-falutin', Frenchified, crocheted-rosette food before some folks what ain't used to it, and field-hand grub before them what's the airiest in town. Ain't nothin' like that ever been done in this house, what's been known for its feed for fifty years, and I don't believe your pa would like it, that I don't. But—"

"A man was once hung for not minding his business, Tildy. Ever hear of him? Now you go right straight along back to the kitchen and see that what I want done is done. For the lunch you must do

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your best. Things are to be as good at that as they are bad for dinner to-night. Are you sure you understand?"

"Yes'm. I hear you. And that five dollars—"

Miss Gibbie waved her out. "Depends entirely on yourself. Not a penny unless I am satisfied. You understand that, too, don't you?"

"I does that." Tildy's chuckle was heard down the hall, and again Miss Gibbie pressed the bell on the table. Three rings were sounded this time, and Jackson, hearing his signal, hurried to her sitting-room, and at the open door stood waiting until she was ready to speak.

"At lunch to-day," she said, not looking up from the desk at which she was writing, "you had better have both dry and sweet wine. Sherry, too, if any one wishes it. I don't think the ladies take wine for lunch, and I don't know the kind they care for. But have it out and begin with Sauterne."

Jackson bowed. "Yes'm," he said, and waited. Miss Gibbie's writing continued, and after a moment Jackson put his hand to his mouth and coughed.

"To-night," he said, "just champagne or—"

"Just nothing. Not a drop of anything. If anybody wants water they can have it, but not even water out of a bottle."

"Nothin' in the gent'men's room up-stairs?" Jackson stopped and stepped backward into the hall. Miss Gibbie was looking at him.

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"You can go, Jackson. Nothing to drink anywhere, and no cigars. Wait a minute! For every mistake you make to-night there is fifty cents, but there mustn't be more than ten. No discourtesy of course—just blunders. Am I understood?"

Jackson bowed again. "Yes'm, you is understood." And as he went softly down the steps he wiped his forehead and twisted his handkerchief into double and single knots in an effort to unravel a puzzle whose purpose was beyond guessing.

Out on the lawn as he cut and trimmed bush after bush of old-fashioned flowers, wheeling his barrow from place to place, and gathering up the clipped twigs and branches, he talked slowly to himself, and presently his brow cleared and the weight of responsibility lifted.

"'Tain't my doin's," he said presently. "And 'tain't my business to tell other people how cracky some of their doin's look to onlookers. But it beat me that this heah kind o' dinner is a goin' to be give white folks in Mars Judge Gault's house. Ain't never seen such eatin's anywhere as ladies and gent'men have sot down to in his day, and to think what Miss Gibbie is agoin' to do to-night is enough to make him grunt in glory. That 'tis. I often wonder how he gits along, anyhow, without his juleps.

"But there's a reason for what she's a doin'." He looked critically at the branch of pomegranates in his hand, then let it fly back to its place near the top

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of the bush. "You can bet your best shoe-strings there's a reason, but in all Gord's world there ain't nobody but her would act on it. I wonder if Miss Mary Cary knows about it? She ain't agoin' to be here, and I bet Miss Gibbie ain't told her what's in her mind. She sho' do love her, though, Miss Gibbie do. But Miss Gibbie's bound to let out every now and then and be Miss Gibbie-ish, and you mark me if this heah doin's to-day ain't a-lettin' out."

Through the open window he heard two rings of a bell—the housekeeper's signal—and, with a glance upward and a soft chuckle, he carted his wheelbarrow behind the stables, then went into the house to make ready for lunch.

In her room Miss Gibbie pushed pen and paper aside. "Well, Jane," she said, "is everything ready?"

"Everything. You are coming down to see the table before the ladies come, aren't you? I never saw anything so beau-ti-ful in all my life!"

"Oh yes you have. What did I send you to New York for, make you go to the best hotels and have you look into table arrangements and menus and things of that kind if you are to come back here and think a Yorkburg table is the most *beau-ti-ful* you ever saw?" She mimicked Jane's emphasis of beautiful, then got up and stretched out her arms. "I'm getting as stiff as a stick. Well, come on. Let's go down and see this French feast. Yorkburg

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hasn't had anything new to talk about since the council meeting. Some unknown dishes will help them out for a day or two. If anybody stays later than three o'clock set the house on fire—do anything to make them go home. There must be time to rest before the next invasion. You see that I get it!"

She walked slowly down the steps into the dining-room, and as she entered it she stopped in surprise, then went closer to the table. For a moment she stood with her hands upon it, then walked around, viewing it from one side and then the other, and as she finished her survey she looked up.

"Mary Cary did this, I suppose?"

"Yes'm, she did. She wouldn't let me tell you she was down here. Said she knew I had so much to do, she just ran in to help fix the table. Did you ever see anything as lovely as that basket of lilies of the valley and mignonette? They look like they're nodding and peeping at you, and these little vases of them in between the candlesticks are just to fill in, she says. She brought her candle-shades because she didn't think you had any to go with lilies of the valley and mignonette. These came from Paris and were very cheap, she says; but ain't they the prettiest things! These mats are the finest Cluny she's ever seen, she told me. I don't see how she can remember so many different kinds of lace. I hope I won't forget to close the shutters and light the candles. She didn't want to put the candle-

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sticks on the table; said they were for to-night, and she thought it was nicer to have daylight and air than lighted candles and dimness. But I read in a fashion magazine that candles were always used in high society these days, though not of course where people do natural things, and I begged her to let them stay on. She did, but she said you must decide."

"Shut up, Jane! You're such a fool! Your tongue and Mrs. McDougal's, as she says, are two of a pair, and, once started, never stop. I'll do some things for some people, but I perspire for nobody. This is the latest spring and the hottest May I've ever known, and if those shutters were closed there'd be trouble. The second generation uses candles in the daytime at a sitting-down lunch. This house is over a hundred years old. Take them off!"

She waved her hand toward the table, then looked around the large high-ceilinged room, with its wainscoting of mahogany, its massive old-fashioned furniture, its portraits of her great and great-great-grandparents on the walls, the mirror over the mantel, the heavy red velvet hangings over the curtains at the long windows, the old-patterned silver on the sideboard, the glass and china in the presses, and again she waved her hand. This time with a wide, inclusive sweep.

"Next week this room must be put in its summer clothes. Red in warm weather has an enraging quality that is unendurable." She turned toward

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the door. "You've done very well, Jane. I want lunch promptly, and, remember, things to-night must be as plain as they are pretty this morning. Did everything come all right?"

"Everything. Mickleton always sends beautiful things. I know the ladies never ate anything like them."

But Miss Gibbie did not hear. Again in her room she rang once more. This time but once the bell was pressed, and almost instantly her maid was at her side.

At her dressing-table Miss Gibbie turned. "Get out that light-gray satin gown with the rose-point lace in the sleeves," she said, "and the stockings and slippers to match it. To-night I want that old black silk, the oldest one. When the ladies come tell Celia to show them up-stairs in the front room if they wish to come up. You will be up there. And keep my door closed. To-night do the same thing, only see that my door is locked to-night. If it isn't, Puss Jenkins will lose her way in there trying to find it. What time is it?"

"Quarter to twelve."

"I'll be down-stairs at one-twenty. Lunch is at one-thirty. Some will get here by one o'clock. Show them the drawing-room if there are signs of wandering round the house. You can go!"

Emmeline closed the door noiselessly, and Miss Gibbie, left alone, put down the pearl breast-pin

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she had been holding and took her seat in the chintz-covered chair, with its gay peacocks and poppies, and put her feet on the footstool in front. In the mirror over the mantel she nodded at herself.

"I wonder what makes you such a contrarious person, Gibbie Gault? Wonder why you will do things that make people say mean things about you? But that's giving people pleasure. Some people would rather hear something mean about other people, especially if they're prosperous, than listen to the greatest opera ever sung. Not all people, but even good people, slow at everything else, are quick to believe ugly things of others. Isn't it a pity there can't be a little more love and charity in this world, a little more confidence and trust?"

She unfastened the belt at her waist and threw it on the table. "Mary says there's more of it than I know, and maybe there is—maybe there is! But won't Benny Brickhouse be raging when he leaves here to-night! He's been smacking his lips and patting his stomach all day over the thought of a Gault dinner. I know he has. Terrapin and canvas-backs, champagne, and Nesselrode pudding are all a jumble in his mind this minute. And to give him vegetable soup and ham and cabbage and half-cooked goose!" She beat the arm of her chair and screwed her eyes tight in anticipation of his disappointment, then again nodded to the face in the mirror.

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"Next time, Mr. Benjamin Brickhouse, you will probably be more careful how you talk of ladies. Miss Gibbie Gault is a stingy old cat, is she? She's too free in her speech for you, talks too plainly, is a dangerous old woman with advanced views, is she? And she oughtn't to have let a young girl like Mary Cary go before a lot of men and talk as she talked last Monday night in the council chamber, ought she? But she knows how to give a good dinner all right. You'll give her credit for that. The trouble with people who make remarks about cats is they forget cats have claws, and the trouble with Mr. Benjamin Brickhouse is he made his remarks to Puss Jenkins. Percolator Puss can't keep from telling her own age, and a woman who does that who's still hoping isn't responsible for the words of her mouth.

"And Snobby Deford will be here, too. She has heard I entertained lords and ladies in London and is anxious to see how I do it. I'll show her how I don't. I'm an old crank who tries to ride rough-shod over everybody, she says, and I spend much too much money on my table; but if I do it she don't mind eating my good things. Don't she? Well, she'll get a chance to-night. In Miss Patty Moore's millinery store she threw these posies at me, and Annie Steele caught them. Assenting Annie didn't throw any back, as Annie is merely an assenter, but neither of the honorable ladies who were coming to break my

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bread knew that Susie McDougal's ears were hearing ears. Susie says pompous-class people often act as if plainer-class ones weren't made of flesh and blood.

"And Mrs. Deford thinks, with Mr. Brickhouse, that there's to be champagne to-night. She is fond of cocktails and champagne—things I prefer women not to care for—but she will get neither here. A mistake never escapes her eagle eye, and the use of the wrong knife or fork is a shuddering crime. If Jackson would drop one or the other down the back of that very low-neck dress she wears so much I'd give him an extra dollar. I don't suppose I ought to mention it but"—she took up a piece of paper on the table at her side and examined it carefully—"if it could be arranged—" She waved the paper in the air. "Now that is as good and wholesome a bunch of women as are on earth! And they aren't stupid, either. Pity so many good people are dull!"

Again she examined the paper, reading the names aloud: "Mrs. Corbin, Mrs. Moon, Mrs. Tate—Buzzie isn't the brainiest person in the world, but one of the funniest—Mrs. Tazewell, Mrs. Burnham—I like that young woman, she's got sense—Miss Matoaca Brockenborough, Miss Mittie Muncaster, and Miss Amelia Taylor. I'm the fourth spinster. For a place the size of Yorkburg that's an excellent group of women, though they don't speak French or wear Parisian clothes. Mittie Muncaster says she makes

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all of hers without a pattern, and they look it, but, as women go, they're above the average."

She took up another slip of paper and glanced over it: "Mr. and Mrs. Porter, Mr. and Mrs. Steele, Mr. James and Miss Puss Jenkins, Mr. Brickhouse and Mrs. Deford, Judge Lynn and myself. As light a lot of timber as ever sat down to soup. They haven't left a leg for Mary Cary to stand on since her talk before the council, and yet, on the whole, I haven't heard as much about it as I expected. That little piece of information concerning her English grandfather was efficacious. That her father was an unknown actor has long been a source of satisfaction to certain Yorkburgers, and to learn that his blood was not only Bohemian but blue, and worse still, distinguished, was hard on them.

"Yes"—she tapped the table with the tips of her fingers—"I was sorry it was best to mention Mary's English relations, but it was. As long as people are weighed and measured according to what they come from rather than what they are it is at times necessary to state a few facts of family history. Stock rises or falls according to reports. Some mouths have to be treated and the sort of salve one uses depends upon the sores. Not yet can a person be taken at face value. Ancestor-worship isn't all Chinese. An ill-bred gentleman-born is still welcomed where an ill-born well-bred man is not invited. Queer place, this little planet in which we swing through

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space, Gibbie Gault, and nothing in it queerer than you. A million or two years from now we may see clearly, approach sense and civilization, and in the mean time you get up and dress yourself so as to be ready for your guests!"

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XII

THE BARGAIN

SHE held out her hand. "How do you do? Where is Mary this afternoon? Sit down and stop staring at me like that. I'm no Chinese idol. If I choose to put on a mandarin coat and sit on my front porch, whose business is it but mine?"

"Nobody's, madam!" John Maxwell bent over and shook Miss Gibbie's hand vigorously. "You are indeed no Chinese idol. But in such gorgeousness you might be twin sister to that fearless lady of long finger-nails and no soul, the Do-wagger Empress of China, as Mrs. McDougal called her. She was a woman of might and a born boss. I understand you are letting the people of this town know you are living here again. I've come to hear about the parties."

He drew a chair close to Miss Gibbie's, and took from her lap the turkey-wing fan. "That's a fine coat you've got on. Did you wear that yesterday?"

"I did not. Too hot. And then Annie Steele has such poppy eyes they might have fallen in her soup-plate had I put it on, and her husband can't

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stand any more expense from Annie. She's the kind of wife who cries for what it wants, and he's the kind of husband who gives in to tears. But they're happy. Neither one has any sense. Where's Mary?"

"I don't know. Seeing something about a party she is going to give the orphan-asylum children on her birthday, I believe. Some time off yet, but she's always ahead of time. I went by Mrs. Moon's this morning, and several of the lunchers came in and told of the war-whoops of the diners. Best show I've been to in years. From their reports I thought I'd better come up and see if there were any scraps of you left."

"I'm all here." Miss Gibbie took the fan from his hand and began to use it; then threw back her head and laughed until the keen gray eyes were full of tears. "Wasn't it mean of me? Wasn't it mean to invite people to your house and not have for them one single thing worth eating, especially when they had come for the sole purpose of enjoying a good dinner, and finding out whether or not I followed the traditions of my fathers? What does Mary think about it?"

John bent over, hands clasped loosely between his knees. "Pretty rough. She is particular about who she invites to her house, but, having invited them, she—"

"Treats them properly. Very correct. Mary is

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young and life is before her. I am old and going to do as I choose."

"But why do you ask people of that kind to your house? If you don't admire them—"

"What nonsense!" Miss Gibbie's chin tilted and she looked at John with an eye at an angle that only Miss Gibbie could attain. "When one gives formal dinner-parties people are usually invited for a purpose not pleasure. I have known my guests of last night for many years. 'Tis true I've seen little of them for the past twenty, but I'm back here to live, and it was necessary they should understand certain things they didn't seem to be taking in. They're a bunch of bulldozers and imagine others are in awe of them—socially, I mean. In all their heads together there aren't brains enough to make anything but trouble, but empty heads and idle hands are dangerous, and kings can be killed by cats. Don't you see this town is dividing itself into factions? Already one element is arraying itself against the other, and Mary Cary is the cause of it. It was time to let the opposing element understand I understood the situation; also that I had heard certain remarks it had pleased them to make; also, again, that I am not as extravagant as they had been told. A good, plain table is what I keep—only last night it wasn't good. You should have seen it!"

Miss Gibbie leaned back in her chair and fanned with wide, deliberate strokes. "I fixed the flowers.

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They were sunflowers fringed with honeysuckle in a blue glass pitcher — colonial colors as befitted my ancestried guests. The pitcher was Tildy's. My dear"—she tapped John's knee with the tip of her fan—"don't bother about them. You can't make some people mad. As long as they think I have money they won't cut my acquaintance. They'll abuse me, yes. Everybody is abused who can't be used; but they'll come to the next party if it's given to a celebrity and there's the promise of champagne. Of course last night I couldn't say all the things I wanted to say; that's the disadvantage of being a hostess, but I think they understand Mary Cary is a friend of mine. Mary doesn't approve of my methods. Sorry, but methods depend upon the kind of people with whom you have to deal. Love is lost on some natures, and certain individuals use weapons she doesn't touch. Anybody can stab in the back; it takes an honest person to fight fair, and a strictly honest person is as rare as one with good manners. All Mrs. Deford wants is the chance to stab. But what about the lunch? Was that abused, too?"

"Not on your life! Didn't you say you had some cigars around here? I've used all of mine and can't get your kind in town." He got up and started indoors. "As I order the kind you keep for company, I don't mind smoking them. May I have one?"

She waved her fan. "In the library behind the Brittanica. Keep them there to save Jackson from

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the sin of smoking them. Best darky on earth, but helping himself isn't stealing, of course. What did they say about the lunch?"

John lighted his cigar and took a good whiff. "You're a sensible woman, Miss Gibbie, to let a fellow smoke a thing like that. It begets love and charity. What did they say about the lunch? Let me see: Most beautiful thing ever seen in Yorkburg, most delicious things to eat, most of them never tasted or heard of before; perfect service, exquisite lace table-cloth or lace something, patriarchal silver, ancestral china, French food, table a picture, you another. Said you looked like a duchess in that old-fashioned gray satin gown. Mrs. Tate declared anybody could tell you were a lady the minute they saw your feet, even if they didn't know who you were, but Mrs. Burnham thought it was your hands that gave you away. Your hands are rather remarkable."

John patted the latter, then flicked the ashes from his cigar. "I didn't tell them, but I could have done so, that it wasn't an idiosyncrasy, but sense, that made you wear elbow sleeves all the time. An arm and wrist and hand like yours have no right to be hidden."

"Nonsense, nonsense!" Again the fan was waved, but Miss Gibbie's lips twitched. "Vanity in a woman of my age is past pardon. I don't like anything to touch my wrist, and sleeves are in the way. Tell me"—she leaned toward him—"is Mary worried with me?"

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"Not that I know of. I have scarcely seen her for two days. She's been having so many committee meetings, and so many people have been after her for this and for that, and some sick child at the asylum had to be visited so often, that except in the evenings I have hardly had time to speak to her. And then she is so tired I don't like to keep her up. She can't stand this sort of thing, Miss Gibbie. It will wear her out, and it ought to be stopped." He got out of his chair and began to walk up and down the porch, one hand in his pocket, the other holding his cigar. "It's got to be stopped."

"Who is going to stop it?"

"I know who'd like to stop it." He stood in front of her. "Aren't you going to help me, Miss Gibbie?"

"I am not." She looked up into the strong face now suddenly serious. "I mean in the way you mean. I am going to keep her from wearing herself out, but she is not doing that. Hedwig takes care of her and sees that she gets proper food and rest and is spared a thousand things other women have to contend with. And it doesn't hurt anybody to be busy. If you don't think about something else you think about yourself, and the most ruinous of all germs is the ego germ. She isn't likely to be attacked, for she has good resistance, but it's in the air, and I don't want her to get it. She is very happy."

"Is she?"

"Why not? Isn't she leading the life she wants

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to lead? She has a passion for service. She has a home of her own, simple, but complete; is earning an income sufficient to take care of herself, and has, besides, a little money, every cent of which she gives away, however; and, above all, she has the power of making people love her. What more could a girl want?"

"Is it enough?"

"Quite enough!" Miss Gibbie's eyes flashed into John Maxwell's. "Why not enough? She has work to do, a place to fill, is needed, and is bringing cheer and sunshine to others. There is a great deal to be done for Yorkburg, and being that rare thing, a leader, she has already started much that will make great changes later on. Sit down and stop looking at me that way! She has quite enough."

John threw his cigar away and took the chair she pushed toward him. "I don't believe we do understand each other as well as we thought," he said, again leaning forward and clasping his hands together. "I know what Mary is to you. I saw it that first day I joined you at Windemere, and during the weeks we were together I saw also it wasn't Mary alone I'd have to win, but there'd be you to fight as well. I told you in the beginning just where I stood. I've kept nothing from you and I'm fighting fair, but neither you nor anybody else on God's earth can keep me from trying to make her my wife. Life is before us—"

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"And behind me."

He flushed. "I didn't mean that. I mean that Mary is not to sacrifice herself to an idea, to a condition, if I can help it. I'm with her in all this work for the old place. I love it. I've tried to prove it in more than words, and I would not ask her to give it up entirely. A home can always be kept here, but another sort of home is meant for Mary. And it's the one I want to make for her."

"Your mother's?"

John's steady eyes looked in the stormy ones. "No — not my mother's. When Mary is my wife she goes to the home of which she is to be the mistress. Like you, my mother—"

"Objects to matrimony. I understand Mrs. Maxwell is as much opposed to your marriage as I am to Mary's. That should be a stimulus to both of you. Opposition is a great incentive, but in this case the trouble is with Mary herself. Would you marry her, anyhow?"

"I would." He smiled. "I'd take Mary any way I could get her. Oh, I used to have theories of my own about such things, but love knocks theories into nothingness. It makes us do things we never thought we would, doesn't it?"

Miss Gibbie turned her head away from his understanding eyes, and tapped the porch impatiently with her foot.

"It makes fools of most people. But as long as

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we've mentioned it we might as well have this out. Mary doesn't want to marry anybody. She is happy, and you are not to be coming down here trying to make her change her mind, trying to take her away!"

"Who is going to stop it?"

They were her words, and at remembrance of them her face changed and over it swept sudden understanding, and her hand went helplessly toward him.

"John," she said, "I'm an old woman and she's all I've got. Don't take her from me! Don't take her away!"

He frowned slightly, but he took the hand which he had never before seen tremble, and smoothed it gently. "Not from you, Miss Gibbie. I wouldn't take her out of your life. She would let nothing or nobody do that, but for years I have been waiting—"

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-seven in October."

She sat suddenly upright. "An infant! She will be twenty-three in June. And I—I am sixty-five. Your life, as you said, is before you, yours and hers. Mine is behind, but in the little of mine left I need her. Will you hold off for a while? Listen! She doesn't know she loves you. Doesn't know the reason she has never loved any one else is because there is but one man in her life, and that is you. I didn't want to tell you this, didn't want you to know it, don't want her to know it—yet. She is a child

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still, though so verily a woman in much. She has owned you since that first visit you made to Michigan, a big, awkward, red-faced boy of seventeen, with the same fearless eyes you've got now and the same determined mouth. You've told me about it and she's told me about it and how all you said at first was 'How'd do, Mary? I'm here.' And you've been 'here' ever since. Don't you see she takes you for granted? The best of women will do that and never guess how rare a thing is a strong man's love. For you there's but one woman in the world, but a woman is the strangest thing God's made yet, and there are no rules by which to understand her. And you don't understand Mary. Until she does what it is in her heart to do here—gets rid of some of the regulations that use to enrage her as a child, starts flowers where are weeds, and opens eyes that are shut—she couldn't be happy. But listen! I am going to tell you what for cold, hard years I pretended not to believe. A woman's heart never ceases to long for the love that makes her first in life, and after a while Mary will know her arms were meant to hold children of her own."

For a moment there was silence, and then Miss Gibbie spoke again.

"Let her alone, John. Let her find for herself that the best community mother should be the woman who has borne children and knows the depths of human experience are needed to reach its heights. She has her own ideas of service; so have I. Mine

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are that most people you try to help are piggy and grunt if you happen to step on their toes. She says they grunt only when the stepping is not by accident, and the pigginess is often with the people who help. As benefactors they want to own the benefactored. Perhaps they do. She knows much more of the behind-the-scenes of life than I do. But I know some things she doesn't, and a good many you don't. If I didn't like you, boy, I wouldn't tell you what I'm going to tell you, and that is, stay away and let her miss you. I'd tell you to keep on and nag her to death, and make her despise you for your weakness. She'll never marry a man she doesn't respect, even if she loved him, and love is by no means dependent on respect."

Miss Gibbie nibbled the tip of her turkey-wing fan for a moment of stillness, unbroken save for the twitter of birds in the trees near by, then turned once more to the man by her side.

"I'll be honest with you. I don't want her to marry you or anybody else. I want to keep her with me; but I'll be square. It will be hands off until she decides for herself. If you will say nothing to her for a year I will say nothing before her against marriage in general, and I've said a great deal in the past. And, moreover, I will wrap my blessing up to-day and hand it out a year hence if you deserve it, even if the handing breaks my heart." She held out her hand. "Is it a bargain?"

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"I don't know whether it is or not." He interlocked his fingers and looked down on the floor of the porch. The ridges in his forehead stood out heavily, and his teeth bit into his under lip. "It is asking a good deal, and I don't like to make a promise I might not be able to fulfil. A year is a long time. She might need me. Something might happen."

"About your only chance. Don't you see she needs something to wake her up? I'm not going to wake her. I want her to sleep on. I'm selfish and don't deny it. But, of course, do as you choose." She waved her fan with a wash-my-hands-of-you air, and settled herself back in her chair. "I've been a fool to talk as I have, perhaps, but I couldn't see a dog hit his tail on a fence and not tell him it was barbed if I knew it and he didn't. Being a man, you must think it over, I suppose, and take a week to find out what a woman could tell you in the wink of an eye. A man's head is no better than a cocoanut where his heart is concerned."

"If I should do this," he said, presently, "and anything should happen in which she needed me, and you did not let me know, did not send for me, I—"

"Don't be tragic, *mon enfant*. And in the mean time I don't mind telling you she is coming down the street. I wouldn't turn my head, if I were you, though that big hat she's got on, with the wreath of

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wild roses, is very becoming. She ought always to wear white. She is inside the gate now." His hand was given a quick warm grasp. "Boy—boy—I've been young. If she needs you I will let you know."

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XIII

A GRATEFUL CONVALESCENT

"AIN'T it pink and white and whispery to-day?" she said to herself. "The birds are having the best time, and the sun looks like it's singing out loud, it's so bursting bright. 'Tain't hard to love anybody on a day like this."

Peggy's thin little fingers played with the spray of roses on her lap, and her big brown eyes roved first in one direction and then the other as she followed the movements of the girl on the lawn cutting fresh flowers for the house; then as the latter came closer she held out a wasted little hand, but drew it back before it was seen.

It was her first day outdoors for three weeks, and it was very good to be in the open air again. She leaned back in the steamer-chair filled with pillows, in which she had been placed an hour before, and stretched out her feet luxuriously. Over them a light blanket had been thrown, and as she smoothed the pink kimona which covered her gown she sighed in happy content.

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"This is me, Peggy McDougal, who lives in Milltown," she went on, talking to herself, "but right now feeling like she might be in heaven. My! but I'm glad I ain't, though, 'cause there mightn't be anybody in heaven I know, and this place where Miss Mary Cary lives is happy enough for me. Muther say I'd been dead and buried before this if'n it hadn't been for Miss Mary. I reckon I would. Some nights I thought I was goin' to strangle sure, and the night I had that sinker spell, and pretty near faded out, I saw Miss Mary, when 'twas over, put her head down on the table and just cry and cry. Look like she couldn't help it. She thought I didn't know a thing. But I did. I knowed she cared. Warn't it funny for a lady like her to care about a little child like me what comes of factory folks and ain't got nothin' ahead but plain humbleness?

"And diphtheria is a ketchin' disease muther says. That's why Miss Mary picked me up so quick and brought me out here when the doctor said I had it. If'n she hadn't Teeny might have took it from me, 'cause we sleep in the bed together, and Susie might, too, for she's in the same room, and all the twins might, the little ones and the big ones, and muther would have been worked to death a-nursin' of me and a-cookin' for the rest. And I might have died and been put in the ground, and then they'd had to pay for the funeral, and there warn't a cent for it. Muther couldn't have paid for a funeral out of eggs,

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'cause coffins have gone up, and the hens don't lay 'em fast enough, and 'twould have took too many. I wish hens could lay more than one egg a day. Roosters ain't a bit of 'count for eggs."

She put her hands behind her head and drew in a deep breath. "But I ain't dead." Suddenly the wasted little fingers were pressed over tightly closed eyes. "Oh Lord," she said, soberly, "I'm very much obliged to you for lettin' of me live. I hope nobody will ever be sorry I didn't die. Help me to grow up and be like Miss Mary Cary. Lookin' out, like her, for little children what ain't got anybody special to be lookin' after them. 'Course I had my muther and father, but they had so much to do, and didn't have the money, and diphtheria takes money. Poor people ain't got it. If'n I don't ever have any money, please help me to help some other way. Maybe I might be cheerfuler. Amen."

"Hello, Peggy. Sleep?"

Mary Cary's hands, flower-filled, were held close to Peggy's face, and at sound of her voice Peggy's eyes opened joyfully. "Oh, Miss Mary, you skeered me! I thought you were way down by the gate. *Ain't* they lovely! Ain't they LOVELY!" And Peggy's little pug nose sniffed eagerly the roses held close to them.

"Hardly anything left but roses now, but June is the rose month. Lend me one of your cushions and I'll sit down awhile and cool off before I go in."

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She laid the flowers carefully on the ground, threw the cushion beside them and, pulling Peggy's chair closer to the large chestnut-tree, whose branches made a wide circle of shade in the brilliant sunshine, sat down, then rested her hand in Peggy's lap and smiled in her happy eyes.

"It's good to have you out here, Peggy child," she said. "You'll soon have cheeks like peaches. This sunshine and fresh air will paint them for you and make the color stick. Did you have some milk at ten?"

"Yes'm, thank you. Milk and eggs, too. Reckon I'll be bustin' fat by this time next week if'n I keep on swallowin' all them things Miss Hedwig brings me. She certainly is a good lady, that Miss Hedwig is. She's got roses in her cheeks, and ain't her light hair pretty? She wears it awful plain, just parted and brushed back, but it's like the silk in corn. Is that all the name she's got—Hedwig?"

"No. Hedwig Armstrong is her name. She's an Austrian."

"I knew a girl named Armstrong once, but she was a Yorkburger. Is Armstrong Austrian, too?"

"Armstrong is American, I suppose. I don't know what it is." She laughed, pulling the petals off a rose and popping them with her lips. "Hedwig is a pretty name, and the other part I never think of. I had almost forgotten the other part."

"I didn't know there was any other part. But I

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heard Susie tell muther once that Mrs. Deford and Miss Honoria Brockenborough were talking about her the day they bought their spring hats, and they said she looked like a mystery to them, and they thought 'twas very strange a nice-looking white woman should be willing to come down here and be a servant."

Mary Cary frowned quickly. "I wish they had said that to me. Hedwig is my maid, but she is my friend as well. She used to be in my uncle's hospital. In all this big country she hasn't a relative."

"They said her letters had Mrs. on them. Somebody at the post-office told them so, but her husband ain't ever been to see her, they said, and muther say she didn't think that sounded as righteous as it might, comin' from Mrs. Deford, whose husband don't seem to hanker after her neither, and—"

"Next time you hear anything like that you might mention that dead husbands can't visit conveniently. Hedwig's husband is dead."

Peggy sat upright, eyes wide and interested. "Poor thing! I thought she had an awful lonely look at times. I certainly am sorry he's dead. I mean if he was worth killing. Muther say all men ain't. Hasn't she got any little children, either?"

Mary Cary bent over the rose in her hand and buried her lips in its damp depths. "No," she said, after a moment, "she has no children. Her little girl died."

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Peggy leaned back. Overhead a bluebird, straining its little throat in exultant melody, flew from branch to branch of the big chestnut-tree, and the hum of insects made soft monotone to the shrill cry of the locust, which promised greater heat next day. In the distance the Calverton road stretched white and dusty south to town, north to the unknown land, the land of dreams to Peggy and to Peggy's mother, who had never been beyond it, and as she looked toward it she wondered if it led to the place where Hedwig had laid her little child. She would never speak of this again. She could tell by Miss Mary's face she would not like it.

For some minutes they sat in silence and then Peggy's hand reached out and touched that of Mary Cary's, which was resting on the arm of her chair. The eyes of the latter were narrowed slightly as if lost in memories, and, looking at her, Peggy hesitated, then called her name.

"Miss Mary—"

With a deep breath as if back from a journey, she stirred, and with a start looked up. "Did you speak to me?"

Peggy's hand gripped the one on which it rested. "I just want to tell you something. How long has it been since the first day I was took sick?"

"Since the first day you were took sick? Let me see." Mary Cary laughed, and her fingers closed

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over the thin ones, which seemed to be trembling. "It's been three weeks to-day."

"And I've been here—?"

"Three weeks to-morrow. Why?"

"I was wondering if you would mind telling me what made you do it—what made you bring me out here and nurse me and sit up with me. What made you do it?"

"What made me do it?" Her voice was puzzled. "I never thought of what made me do it. I loved you, Peggy. You are my friend, you know, and you were sick. I wanted to do it."

"Diphtheria is ketchin'."

"Not if you're careful. I knew how to take care of myself. But your mother didn't, and with children it's a risk to have it around. I wasn't afraid."

"But you might have took it. And muther says you've been a prisoner since I've been out here. You couldn't go nowhere, and couldn't nobody come to see you. Ain't any the mill folks and factory folks seen you for three weeks. You couldn't even go to see Miss Gibbie Gault."

"But she has been to see me. I'd fumigate myself and come out here and see her nearly every day, and I can talk to everybody over the telephone. Wires are germ-proof so far, though they'll tell us they're not after a while, I suppose. And I've had a good rest and chance to catch up with lots of reading. You weren't really ill but four days, and—"

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"Them four days near 'bout wore you out. I know. I saw a lot of things you didn't think I saw. It ain't pleasant for nobody to see somebody nearly strangle, and you thought I was gone once." She turned the big, brown eyes, which too early in life had learned to understand the burden of demand without supply, upon the girl beside her, and her lips quivered.

"I don't know how to tell you what I want to tell you. When you feel something right here"—she put her shut hand upon her breast—"it's hard to put it in words. There ain't any words for it. I couldn't no way tell you how much I thank you, and I ain't got but one way to show it. 'Tis by livin' right. But I want you to know I understand. So does God. I've been talkin' right much with Him about it, and I'm askin' Him every day to make me fitt'n' to be your friend. They say love can do a lot for a person, and make a good thing out of a bad one, quicker'n anything else. And you'll never know on this earth how much I love you, Miss Mary."

"Why, Peggy!" Mary Cary's arms were around the shaking little figure, whose face had grown white with the effort of her frankness.

"Why, Peggy dear, what are you talking about? There's nothing to thank me for. Who wouldn't do what's been done? You mustn't talk like—"

"Nobody but you would have done it. I warn't any kin, and 'twarn't a Christian duty like goin' to

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church. And 'twas enough to make Miss Gibbie mad. Is she mad with me, Miss Mary?"

"Of course she isn't! You couldn't help getting sick." The pillows were patted and Peggy was forced back among them. "And now there's to be no more thanks for anything. And Peggy"—the clear eyes, suddenly a bit dimmed, were looking into Peggy's—"I've got such a grand piece of news for you. I've been waiting to tell you all the morning."

"Is it I've got to go home?" Peggy's face fell, and she blinked hard to keep back sudden tears. "Have I got to go home?"

"Mercy, no! You won't be able to go home for some time yet. You are to stay here a week longer to get strong and then—you and your mother are to go to Atlantic City for two weeks. Two—whole—weeks!"

Peggy's hands fell limply in her lap, her eyes closed sharply, and down the thin little cheeks tears, no longer to be held back, rolled in big, round drops. For a moment she lay still, then threw her arms around the neck of the girl now leaning beside her, frightened a bit by the effect of her words, and sobbed in unrestraint.

"Please let it come out, Miss Mary. Please let it come out! It's been chokin' of me for days, this thankfulness inside, and I can't breathe good till I get it out!"

For a little longer the short, quick gasps continued,

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and then she drew herself out of the strong arms which had been holding her close, and wiped her eyes with the back of her hand.

"You mean muther won't have to cook for two weeks, won't have to wash dishes—I always wipe them—and can sit down as long as she wants, and can sleep till seven o'clock in the mornin'? You mean— You ain't foolin' of me are you, Miss Mary?"

"Of course I'm not. You are to go to-morrow week."

"But how we goin'? The hens can't lay eggs enough for—"

"The hens have nothing to do with this. A friend of yours and your mother's wants you to have this holiday. This friend knows your mother is tired out, and knows the salt air will do you good."

Peggy gave a deep sigh. "Muther's said fifty times, if she's said once, that if she could go to that Atlantic City and see those things she's read about and seen pictures of she'd give her left foot and hop the rest of her life. There's a lot of water there, ain't it?"

"Ocean of it. And a beautiful beach, and surf bathing, and a boardwalk miles long, and piers, and merry-go-rounds, and shops, and hot sausages, and moving-pictures, and rolling-chairs, and lovely music, and ice-cream waffles, and orangeade, and popcorn. Your mother will see it all, but you will have

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to be careful at first—just sit in the sand and not eat all those things right off."

"Do they give 'em to you?"

Mary Cary laughed. "Not exactly. Nothing is given that can be sold, but there're lots of things, the best things, that don't cost money. If we had to buy air and sunshine and sky and clouds and stars and sunsets we'd sell all we own to get them, but because they're free they're not noticed half the time."

"Does muther know we are goin', Miss Mary?" Peggy's face clouded suddenly. "Who's goin' to take care of things if she and me go way together? Lizzie lives away all the time, and Susie and Teeny works. Who's goin' to look after father and the boys?"

"Your Aunt Sarah. And if you will stop thinking of all those practical things and just be a child and enjoy yourself I will be much obliged to you. Time enough for you to be the mother of a family when you have children of your own."

"I ain't ever goin' to have children of my own. I've helped raise two sets of twins and took care of the baby till it died, and I made up my mind then I wasn't goin' to have any. It hurts too bad when they die. Mis' Toone's had twelve and she says when they're little they're lots of care and when they're big you're full of fear, and I reckon she knows. Her boys turned out awful bad. Muther don't mind havin' a lot of children, though. She don't take 'em

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serious, but she says I was born serious and always wonderin' if there's food and clothes enough to go round. And besides—"

"Besides what?"

"I don't think I'd like a husband. So many in Milltown is just trifles. Mis' Jepson says she's so glad her husband's no blood relation to her she don't know what to do."

"She's had three, if she isn't proud of this last one. Told me so herself."

"She tells everybody. Sometimes she's right set up about havin' buried two and havin' a third livin', and then when she gets mad with Mr. Jepson she says anybody could get husbands like hers. But, Miss Mary"—again the anxious look hovered a moment on the earnest little face—"muther ain't got a dress to her name fitt'n to wear. That's the reason she hasn't been to church this spring. Everybody else had to have something, and it takes all father's money for rent and food, and the egg money went for medicine when Billy was sick."

"Oh, that will be all right. We're going to see she's fixed up. Didn't I tell you to stop thinking about things like that? By the time you're grown you'll have all Milltown on your shoulders."

"You've got all Yorkburg on yours."

"Indeed I haven't." She got up. "But this isn't writing my letters. Did you know they were going to begin building both schools the first of Au-

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gust? The plans have been accepted, and next year you'll be in the new grammar school. Isn't that fine?"

Peggy nodded, but not enthusiastically. "I don't think my head was meant for much schoolin', but of course I'll go until I'm big enough to work. Are you goin' to write to that friend of yours and muther's to-day? If you do would you mind"—she hesitated and her face flushed slightly—"would you mind sayin' I'm awful much obliged for bein' sent to Atlantic City? I haven't took it in good yet. Don't seem like it can be true sure 'nough that Milltown people like muther and me can be goin' to a place like that. My stomach is quiverin' this minute in little chills from hearin' 'bout it. I reckon it will take 'till next week to get used to the feel of the thought. I saw a picture once of a lot of people in bathin', and muther said they didn't look to her like they had enough clothes on, but she say if they choose to make spectickles of themselves there warn't no law to keep you from lookin', and she always believed in seein' all there was to see in life. Muther certainly will have a grand time, and won't she throw back her head and laugh hearty? It certainly is good in your friend to give her the chance. I reckon it must be somebody who loves to give pleasure."

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XIV

A MORNING TALK

MISS LIZZIE BETTIE PRYOR lifted the heavy black veil with which her face was covered and looked up and down the long dusty street, half asleep in the full heat of a July day. Then she walked up the steps of Mrs. Deford's house and into the hall, the door of which was open. From the porch at the back she could hear voices, and for a moment she hesitated. The requirements of custom were punctiliously observed by Miss Lizzie Bettie, and though two months had passed since the death of her father she had paid no visits to friends or relatives, and this first one was now being made in the expectation of a talk alone with Mrs. Deford. Everybody had been kind and everything had been done that could be done, but people were doubtless tired of coming to see six black crows sitting in a darkened parlor, and had stopped doing it, with the result that she did not know what was going on as fully as she should, and it was time to find out.

She put down her parasol and walked to the end

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of the hall. In the door she stood a moment, looking at the south end of the long porch, then advanced slowly toward it. Miss Georganna Brickhouse and Lily Deford were nearest the railing, and near them were the latter's mother and Miss Puss Jenkins. Annie Steele, her little boy on her lap, was listening with her left ear—her right being deaf—to something Mrs. Deford was saying, and, as Miss Lizzie Bettie came nearer, jumped as if caught in an unrighteous act.

"Good gracious, Lizzie Bettie, you frightened me nearly to death!" Mrs. Deford got up and pushed her chair forward. "You came up like a black ghost. Do pray take that heavy veil off. It makes me hot just to look at you!"

"Then don't look." Miss Lizzie Bettie's voice was huffy. She had expected a different greeting. For weeks she had not been outside of her house except on business and to church and the cemetery, and now to be spoken to as if she'd been over every day was a jar. She did not like it.

"I can't help looking if you sit in front of me. It's a heathenish custom, this shrouding of one's self in black, and so unbecoming. Lily, get Lizzie Bettie a glass of iced tea, or would you rather have lemonade?" And Mrs. Deford stopped fanning long enough to put her lorgnette to her eyes and look at her latest visitor critically. She had on a new dress and looked better in it than anything she had ever

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seen her wear before. She wondered where it came from.

"I don't care for tea or lemonade either." Miss Lizzie Bettie unpinned her hat and veil and laid them on the chair behind her, drew off her gloves and, opening her bag of dull jet beads, took from it a handkerchief with a heavy black border, and wiped her lips with careful deliberation. "How are you, Miss Puss? I heard you were going away."

"I did expect to, but I've had dyspepsia so bad in my left foot that I haven't been able to finish my sewing. When I have dyspepsia in my foot this way it feels like it hasn't a bit of feeling in it, and makes me so nervous I'm not fit for a thing. It's a great deal worse than gout. I have gout in my right foot and can put my finger on the spot, but when you feel bad and can't exactly find the place that hurts and haven't any name to call it by it gets on your nerves so that—"

"Everybody runs when they see you coming. For goodness' sake don't get on nerves, Puss. Where are you going?" Mrs. Deford looked up. Lily, her daughter, was trying to get by.

"I want to see Sarah Sue Moon about something," she said. "I promised to be there by twelve and it's nearly half-past. Excuse me, Miss Georganna! Did I step on your toe? Good-bye." She nodded to the others and went into the hall, and her mother, getting up, took the chair she had left and drew it a little apart from her guests.

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"Lily doesn't look well, Laura." Miss Georganna Brickhouse, who always talked through her nose and seemingly with it, owing to the nervous twitching of her nostrils, looked at Mrs. Deford. "You ought to take her away."

"Ought I? If you had a daughter eighteen who didn't want to go away how would you make her do it? Up to this summer we've never had any discussions on the subject. She has always done as I said and gone where I decided, but this year she persists in staying in this dead-and-buried place, and says she don't want to go away. She is very well, but she's got to go the first of August."

"Where are you going? Certainly do wish I had somebody to make me do things. Every time I make up my mind to do this, I wish I'd made it up to do that. But I'm like Lily. I'm more comfortable at home than anywhere else, and I don't think Yorkburg's dead and buried. Things are moving too fast for me. I wish I could make them stop and let it stay just like it is forever and ever. Where are you going in August?"

Mrs. Deford turned and looked at Miss Puss, her lorgnette at a withering angle. "We are going to the coast of Maine." She took up her embroidery and held it off at arm's-length to get its effect. "How is your mother, Lizzie Bettie?"

"Very well, thank you, though she thinks she's sick. I want mother to go away. I wish she and

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Maria could go to the coast of Maine. Maria's as nervous as a cat, and if she don't go somewhere we'll all be to pieces before the summer's over. Where will you stay, Laura? Is it very expensive? I've heard some places up there are very cheap."

"Cheap? Nothing's cheap after you leave Washington. But we are not going to a hotel. We are going to visit friends."

"Must be ashamed of them, as you don't mention their names. Wouldn't have asked if I'd known it was a secret." And Miss Lizzie Bettie took the fan out of Miss Georganna Brickhouse's hands and began to use it as if hot with something more than summer heat.

"You needn't get so mad about it." Mrs. Deford threaded her needle deliberately with a strand of scarlet silk. "And if you are so very anxious to know where we are going I don't mind telling you. We are to be Mrs. Maxwell's guests for the month of August."

"So she's asked you at last, has she? Knew you were terribly afraid she wouldn't?" Miss Puss Jenkins put the gouty foot on the dyspeptic one and rubbed it vigorously. "I heard Mrs. Maxwell's father left her barrels of money and she's rich even for New York. Is she? You visit her and ought to know. Somebody was telling me her house is magnificently furnished, and she tried footmen and butlers in livery, but she couldn't keep that up. John

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made such a fuss she had to stop. Mrs. Maxwell always was the most pretentious, ostentatious sort of person, and I never could understand how her son could be such a natural kind of a fellow with such a mother. He's like his father. They say his father's family was rather plain once, but his mother comes of very good New Jersey stock. Mr. Maxwell was a fine man, which is more than you can say of his wife, and I never did have any use for her. But I suppose if she invited me to spend a month with her in her summer home I'd go. Didn't somebody tell me John had gone to Europe?"

Mrs. Deford turned quickly. "Who said so?"

Miss Puss looked at Mrs. Steele, whose little boy, now on the grass playing with the dog, was satisfactorily disposed of. "Who told us, Annie? Oh yes, I know. It was Miss Gibbie Gault. We met her in the library yesterday morning and she said she and Mary Cary were going away on the twenty-first of this month and stay until the middle of September. I asked her where John was going. A blind man could see he is in love with Mary, and I thought he'd be with them, but Miss Gibbie said he was going to Norway, or was it Russia, Annie? I declare I haven't a bit of memory But, anyhow, he was going somewhere and wasn't to be with Miss Gibbie this summer. I wonder if Mary has kicked him!"

"Kicked him?" Mrs. Deford's lips twisted in an up-curling movement and her eyebrows lifted, ridging

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her forehead in fine little furrows. Again she held off her embroidery and looked at it. "Mary Cary will never have the chance to discard John Maxwell. He is sorry for her and is very kind to her. He knew her when she was in the asylum here, but he has about as much idea of marrying her as of marrying—"

"Lily. That's just what I was saying the other day," and Miss Georganna Brickhouse took off her spectacles and wiped them. "Some one told me he heard John and Lily were engaged, but I knew it wasn't so. A man can't even be polite to a girl these days without somebody gobbling him up and telling him he's done for. I told whoever it was told me I knew John's mother had her eye on something better known in the newspapers than Lily or Mary, either, and she'd never let him marry in Yorkburg if she could help it. Everybody says he's a fine man and a girl would do well to catch him, but—"

"He'll never be caught by Mary Cary. She's tried hard enough. It's a pity somebody don't tell her how it looks to be seen going about with him as she does. She hardly lets him get out of her sight when he's in town. I invited them to tea the last time they were here and she wouldn't let him come; kept him at her house; made some flimsy excuse, and had the evening with him to herself. She's tried her best to get him, but—"

Miss Lizzie Bettie Pryor took up her gloves and

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pulled out each finger separately. "She's done nothing of the kind, Laura, and you know it. I've got no sympathy with some of the things she's doing here, but Mary's not trying to marry anybody. I'll say that much for her. I'm surprised to hear John is going to Europe again. People step over there now just like it was across the street."

Mrs. Deford looked Miss Lizzie Bettie in the face, and this time her head was not on the side. "John Maxwell has no idea of going to Europe. I am better qualified to speak of John's movements than Miss Gibbie. I have very good reasons for being better qualified." She hesitated, tapped her lips significantly with her lorgnette, and smiled mysteriously. "Poor Miss Gibbie! It won't be her fault if Mary Cary don't marry John. She's done her best to run him down."

"Miss Gibbie may be a crank all right, but when she says a thing is so, it is so." Miss Lizzie Bettie's gloves came down with emphasis on the palm of her right hand. "And if she says John is going abroad, he is certainly going. I don't think it is very polite of him if his mother has invited you and Lily to spend August with her, but I never saw a man in my life who had good manners when they interfered with his pleasure. It was your brother who told me he'd heard John and Lily were engaged" —she turned to Miss Georganna Brickhouse—"and, like you, I told him I didn't believe there was a word

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of truth in it. But if Laura doesn't deny it, maybe there is."

Mrs. Deford got up and shook her skirt. "Do any of you see my needle? I've dropped it somewhere. Where did Miss Gibbie say she and Mary were going, Puss? She gives much information about others, but never about herself. Where are they going?"

"Here's your needle." Mrs. Steele held it toward Mrs. Deford. "She didn't say just where they were going, did she, Miss Puss?" Mrs. Steele, who talked little and agreed always with the last one who spoke, looked at the lady rubbing the foot that felt as if it had no feeling in it, and nodded toward her. "She said something about Nova Scotia, I believe, and Boston in September, as Mary wanted to see some schools up there, but she didn't mention just where they were going."

"Of course she didn't. And if Yorkburg knew what was good for it, all these Yankee ideas Mary Cary is bringing down here would be stopped. She spends money in every direction, sends this person away and that one away, and gives picnics and parties to people nobody ever heard of until lately. People of that class are ruined by having the things done for them that she is doing. After a while they'll be wanting to move up on King Street and expect us to speak to them as if they were our friends."

"She says they are hers."

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"Perhaps they are." Mrs. Deford's lips again made their favorite curve. "She evidently has a strong leaning toward poor whites. But there is one direction in which she will lean in vain, and that is—Oh, well—" She put her head on the side and shrugged her shoulders. "I really feel very sorry for her, but a girl can't make a man love her just because she wants him to."

"And a woman can't make a man marry where she'd like him to." Miss Lizzie Bettie pinned on her hat hurriedly. "That's a black cloud coming toward us. If we don't look out we'll get caught in a storm. When congratulations are in order let us know. Good-bye. Come on, Miss Puss." And without further waste of words she was gone.

In the street she and Miss Puss hurried in one direction, Mrs. Steele and Miss Georganna in another, and half-way home the rain began to fall. The one parasol was hastily opened and held close down over their heads, so close that a couple coming toward them with umbrella held in the same position as theirs bumped into them. With a hurried apology they passed on, but not before Miss Lizzie Bettie had seen who they were.

She turned and looked behind and then at Miss Puss. "A new way to come from Sarah Sue Moon's house," she said. "That's the second time this week I've seen them together."

"Who is it?" Miss Puss pulled her skirts up

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higher and stepped carefully aside from a puddle of water. "I can't see a thing with your parasol right over my face. Who was it?"

"Lily Deford and that Pugh boy. The one who stays in the bank."

"What!" Miss Puss stopped in the now pouring rain. "In broad daylight? I've heard they've been seen together several times lately in the evenings. His father keeps a livery stable and his father before him! Do you suppose Laura knows?"

"Of course she doesn't! Lily's soul doesn't belong to her, and if her mother knew this boy was in love with her—well, she mightn't kill him, but he'd be safer out of sight. Of all the ambitious mothers I've ever seen— Do pray hurry, Miss Puss! We'll be drenched if you don't walk faster!"

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XV

BUZZIE

WHO in the world would have thought this morning it was going to rain like this? But that's weather; you never can tell what it's going to do. Just like women. Good gracious! Did you see that flash of lightning?"

Mrs. Tate, sitting on Mrs. Moon's front porch, clapped her hands to her ears and shut her eyes tight, then got up quickly. "You all may stay out here if you want to, but I'm going in. I never did think it was right to tempt Providence, and if there was a feather bed in the house I'd get on it. Can't the windows be lowered, Beth, and somebody start the pianola and turn on the lights? A thunder-storm like this gives me such a sinking feeling in my stomach I feel like I'm sitting on a trap-door with a broken catch. My love! there goes another one!"

Mrs. Moon laughed and got up. "I guess we had better go in, Mrs. Burnham, the porch is getting so wet. I hope Miss Georganna Brickhouse and Mrs. Steele got home before the rain. I saw them coming

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from Mrs. Deford's just now." She pulled the chairs quickly forward as a sudden heavy deluge beat in almost to the door, and called to the maid to lower the windows; then, inside the sitting-room, took up her sewing, Mrs. Burnham taking up hers also.

But sewing was not for Mrs. Tate. As another peal of thunder drowned the downpour of rain she ran to the sofa and piled around her the cushions upon it. Putting one under her feet, another on her head, and clasping one close to her breast with her crossed arms, she closed her eyes tight and sat in huddled terror waiting for the storm to pass.

Neither lightning nor thunder could silence her tongue, however, and, though at some distance from the window near which Mrs. Moon and Mrs. Burnham were sitting, she talked on with slight regard to their attention, from time to time opening her eyes, only to shut them quickly again if a flash of lightning caused fresh fright.

"I might have known it was going to storm like this," she said after a while, "for last night was the hottest night I ever felt in my life. When I went to bed I didn't think I was going to sleep a wink, and I wouldn't if I'd stayed awake and thought about it. The mosquitoes were perfectly awful. Biggest things I ever saw. I thought once there were bats in the room. Sakes alive! that reminds me I haven't ordered a thing for dinner! I didn't intend to stay here a minute; just stopped by on my way to Mr.

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Blick's, and here it is after one o'clock! I get so tired of those everlasting three meals a day that I almost wish there were no such things as stomachs. I would wish it if Mr. Tate wasn't in the feed business. Half one's time is spent in getting something to put in them and the other half in suffering from what we put. Do you all ever have dyspepsia? I do —awful. And not a doctor in town knows what to do for it. I take more medicine—"

"Maybe that is what gives it to you." Mrs. Burnham looked at Mrs. Moon and smiled. When she first came to Yorkburg she had wondered why Mrs. Tate was called "Buzzie," but she had long since found out, also the fitness of the appellation. "I guess I am queer about medicine," she went on, bending over to see if there were any breaks in the clouds. "I rarely take it. There is nothing so apt to keep you sick."

"That's so. And after a while we'll all have to be Christian Scientists or New Thoughters or some other thing that don't call in doctors. I wish I was one this minute. I'd rather think something than swallow something, and nobody but the rich can afford to be sick these days. If you say you've got a plain everyday sort of pain the doctor puts a name on it and yanks you to a hospital and cuts it out before he's sure what the thing really is. If you live you're lucky. If you don't—well, you're dead. That's all. And if you're tired out and fidgety and feel like

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crying as much as you want to, they say you're a nervous prostrationer and tie you to a trained nurse at twenty-five dollars a week, and don't let you see friend or relative until you're better or worse. I tell you Mr. Tate would go crazy if he had to hand out twenty-five dollars a week to have a girl in white wait on me. And I wouldn't blame him. If I were a young man I'd think a long time before I'd get married these days. A man wouldn't buy a horse unless he knew it was healthy, but he'd marry a girl without knowing. But I never saw a man who wouldn't rather butt his own head his own way than be told he didn't have to, and nobody gets thanked for telling. Mercy! I'm hot; nearly melting. Is it still raining, Beth?"

Mrs. Moon got up and raised the window. "Not very much, and the clouds seem to be scattering. I should think you would be roasting, way over in that corner with all those cushions around you. Why don't you come by the window? The air feels so fresh and good."

"No, sir!" Mrs. Tate opened her eyes, but closed them quickly again. "There goes another flash of lightning! The thunder is getting better, but I'm not going to sit by an open window as long as there's any of it left. But I'm hot, all right. Seems to me Yorkburg is a great deal hotter in summer now than it used to be. That's only natural, I suppose, as everything in Yorkburg has changed. If old General

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Wright and Mr. Brockenborough and Major Alden and Judge Gault and some others of their day could come back they wouldn't know it. They were the lordliest, high-handedest bunch of old aristocrats that ever lived, and they ruled this town like they owned it. Specially Major Alden. He didn't have a bit of business sense, Father Tate used to say, but he'd had money all his life and he would spend it; and when there wasn't any to spend he spent on just the same. Major Alden didn't really believe the Almighty made common people. He thought they came up like weeds and underbrush and, though you couldn't cut them down exactly, you must keep them down somehow. He really believed it. Some people think so now."

"Certainly his granddaughter doesn't." Mrs. Burnham put down her work and took up a palm-leaf fan and began to use it, running her finger around the neck of her collar to loosen it. "I don't think anybody in Yorkburg begins to understand what Mary Cary is doing here, or what she means to certain people—"

"I don't suppose we do"—Mrs. Moon started to say something, but Mrs. Tate was ahead of her—"And no one in the world would ever have imagined Mary would do things like that. But that's Mary. From childhood no one ever knew what she'd be doing next. She certainly is looking pretty, but she isn't the beauty her mother was. I'm like Miss Gibbie in one

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thing. I believe in a sure-enough hell. They say real smart people don't any more except preachers who have to and women who want to. Miss Gibbie says she wouldn't believe in it if it hadn't been for the war, but I believe in it because some things have to be burned out, and Major Alden needed to have his pride purified. You knew he used to be a beau of Miss Gibbie's, didn't you?"

Mrs. Burnham shook her head. "No, I know little of Yorkburg's personal history."

"Well, he was. She never was a raging beauty, but she had more men in love with her than any girl she ever knew, mother used to say, and more sense than all the rest put together. That's what I think was so funny. Men don't care for sense in a woman. If she can sign coal tickets and market tickets, and look after them, and be good-looking and nice it's all they care for. I never knew how to make out a check until my own daughter showed me. What's the use? Never had a dollar in bank in my life. Mr. Tate's the kind of man who thinks a woman ought to come to her husband for everything, and as he never gives me money unless I ask for it, and I don't ask until I need it to spend right away, it has no chance to get in a bank. I don't mean I have to worry Mr. Tate. He gives me all he can, and, besides, I always did think it was a mistake in a woman to know too much about business things. Men don't like it. I've always made it a rule never to do anything Mr. Tate

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could do for me. I've often noticed one or the other is going to be helpless, and I'd rather be waited on than wait."

She settled herself more comfortably on the sofa and again opened her eyes cautiously. "Of course I'm old-fashioned. Young people have very different ideas from their parents. Girls plank themselves right straight alongside of men and say they are just as smart as men are. Of course they are. Women have always known it, but they used to have too much sense to tell it. Nowadays they tell everything. The easiest thing on earth to fool is a man. He just naturally loves helplessness, and when Aylette married I told her for mercy's sake not to be one of these new-fashioned kind of wives, but be a clinger. She doesn't like clingers, and sometimes I'm afraid she's too smart to be real happy. She takes after her grandfather Tate. I certainly do thank the Lord He didn't see fit to make me clever. I've often heard my mother say a smart woman had a hard time in life."

"I wonder why Miss Gibbie did not marry." Mrs. Burnham was looking at Mrs. Moon. "If she had so many beaux it is strange she did not marry."

"Now who on earth could think of Miss Gibbie Gault being married!" The cushion dropped from the top of Mrs. Tate's head and she stooped to pick it up. "Her independent tongue was laughed at and her witty speeches repeated, but what home

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could have stood her? She knew better than to get married. If she ever loved anybody, nobody ever knew it, mother used to say, but I always have believed she did. She certainly is one queer person. Mrs. Porter asked her last week to give something to the choir fund and she said she'd do nothing of the kind, and she thought the people ought to be paid for having to listen to squeaks like we had instead of paying them to squeak, and she wouldn't give a cent. She holds on to what she's got like paper to the wall, Mrs. Porter says."

Mrs. Moon got up and pressed the button by the door, and when the maid appeared spoke to her.

"Mrs. Tate and Mrs. Burnham will stay to dinner, Harriet. See that there are places at the table for them."

"Indeed I can't stay to dinner." Mrs. Tate jumped up and came toward the window "I believe it's stopped raining, and if the thunder is over I'll have to run on home. When I left there everything looked like scrambled eggs, and nobody knows where I am, and I wouldn't telephone just after a storm for forty dollars. There's the sun. I'm going. Good-bye." And picking up her skirts with both hands she ran down the steps and out into the street and across it to her house, half-way down the square.

Coming back from the door to which they had followed her, Mrs. Moon and Mrs. Burnham laughed good-naturedly. "How do you suppose she man-

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ages it?" both asked, and then laughed again at the oneness of thought.

"I've often wondered why she didn't lose breath," said Mrs. Burnham, taking her seat this time in the hall for the few minutes longer she could stay. "But I wouldn't dare try to see how she does it. She's worse than Mrs. McDougal. Did you hear of the letter she wrote Miss Gibbie? Mrs. McDougal, I mean. I'm so glad she's coming home before we go away. To hear her tell of her trip will be better than the minstrels. When are you going away, Mrs. Moon?"

The latter shook her head. "I don't know. I'm trying to make Mr. Moon go with me, but I'm afraid there's no use in even hoping it. Richard says it's for the family he is working as he does, and he is honest in thinking it, but if I and the children were to die to-morrow he'd begin the day after the funeral and keep at it just as persistently as ever."

Mrs. Burnham looked down at her work as if examining closely the stitches she had just put in. Mr. Moon was the richest man in Yorkburg, but not for years had he and his wife gone off together for a holiday. Presently she looked up. "Men are queer, aren't they? I suppose all wives wish sometimes they could mix up, as one does dough, a whole bunch of husbands and cut them out in new patterns with some of each other's qualities in each. There's Mr. Corbin. He doesn't work enough. Mr. Moon

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works too much. I saw Mr. Corbin on his front porch the other day reading Plato's *Republic* as though it were the first reading. It was the third he told me. Mr. Moon—"

"Never heard of Plato's *Republic*, or if he did has forgotten it." Mrs. Moon laughed, but as pushing back a sigh. "His republic is Yorkburg and the mills. He can never go away. Often I wonder if it is worth it, the money he is making. He gives me everything on earth but what I want most."

Mrs. Burnham again bent over her work. "A woman has to pay full price for a successful husband," she said, presently. "Perhaps Mr. Corbin's philosophy isn't all wrong. He has no wealth, no fame, no great position, but he has gotten something out of life many men miss."

"And his wife has gotten much some other women miss. Men who make money never seem to have time to enjoy it until too late. In business it's the game men love. They build big houses, fill them with fine furniture and servants, give their wives beautiful clothes and carriages—and then find they have no home. I wish I didn't feel as I do about money, but I've come to see it's the most separating thing on earth."

She stopped and laughed with something of embarrassment. "This is a queer subject you and I have drifted into. We both have husbands of whom we should be proud, but—" Her lips quivered.

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"Men say women don't understand. Perhaps they don't; but when Mr. Moon was not so busy and we could take the buggy, shabby though it was, and go for a long afternoon in the country and talk over our plans, and whether we could afford this or whether that, it was a far happier ride than I take now in the automobile. He gave me one this spring, but he has no time to go with me." Her eyes filled. "There are some things women understand too well."

For a moment there was silence, then she drew her chair closer to the open door. "But a woman shouldn't be silly, should she? I often think of what my old mammy told me the day I was married. 'Don't never forget, honey, that what you's marryin' is a man,' she said, 'and don't be expectin' of all the heavenly virtues in him. They ain't thar.'"

Mrs. Burnham laughed. "They are not. In a woman 'they ain't thar,' either. Miss Matoaca Brockenborough says from observation there is something to be said on both sides." She looked up. "You knew Miss Matoaca was going away with Miss Gibbie Gault and Mary Cary, didn't you? She hasn't been out of Yorkburg for years and is as excited about it as if she were sixteen. She's going as Mary's guest, you know."

"Yes, I know." Mrs. Moon's voice was suddenly troubled. "It is all right, of course, but I can't understand why Mary keeps things so to herself. It isn't like her. She isn't rich. Her uncle is, but I'm

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sure it isn't his money she's spending. Last week Miss Ginnie Grant and her old mother were sent off for a month's stay in the mountains. I don't understand—"

"I don't, either." Mrs. Burnham got up and smiled in the perplexed face before her. "But when the time comes we will all understand, and until then I'm willing to wait. Mary is acting for some one else, I suppose. Several people have been suggested, some men, some women. Somebody said they'd heard a very rich patient of her uncle's out in Michigan was sending her the money to use as she saw best, and others say John Maxwell got some one to buy the bonds for him, but—"

"I don't believe it's John. Of course I don't know." Mrs. Moon got up. "I wish you would stay to dinner. We have peach cream to-day. It's very nice. You'd better stay."

"I wish I could. Peach cream is terribly tempting, but if I'm not at the table Mr. Burnham is as injured as if I'd done him a grievous wrong. He's the only child I have, you know, and I guess he's rather—"

Mrs. Moon smiled in the laughing face. "I guess he is. Good-bye."

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XVI

MEN AND HUSBANDS

WHEN Mrs. Burnham reached the house in which Miss Gibbie lived she hesitated for a moment, hand on the gate, then opened it and walked slowly up the brick box-bordered path to the steps of the pillared porch. The door was open, and inside was Miss Gibbie, the morning paper in her hand.

A quick, absorbing glance took in each detail of the well-kept grounds, the beds of old-fashioned flowers, the fine old trees and stately house, but not until the porch was reached did she look toward the open door.

As she neared it she lowered her parasol, and at its click Miss Gibbie's eyes peered over the top of the paper and looked at her.

"Good-morning! May I come in?"

Miss Gibbie put the paper on the chair by her side, took off her glasses, wiped them, put them back, and again looked at her visitor.

"Not until I look at you for half a minute," she said. "Raise that parasol and stand just where you are. There! That's right! In the doorway you

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look like a Roisart I saw some years ago in France. I wanted to buy it, but the man imagined I was one of those fool Americans who value a thing according to its price, and charged what he thought he could get. He got nothing. Come in. Do you make your own clothes?"

"I make my summer ones." Mrs. Burnham's face lighted with amusement, and, as she took the chair Miss Gibbie pushed toward her, she brushed back the stray strands of hair the breeze had blown across her face, and fastened them securely.

"I told some one the other day you were an illustration of what I have always contended, and that is a woman can look well in very inexpensive clothes if she has sense enough to get the right kind. I hear you have a good deal of sense."

"I have in some things." Mrs. Burnham laughed and took the fan Miss Gibbie held toward her. "I've shown it to-day by coming to see you. Of course I shouldn't, according to regulations, as you won't come to see me, but I wanted to see you and so I came. Do you mind—that I have come?"

The sweet, fine face of the questioner flushed and, at sight of it, Miss Gibbie smiled, then tapped it with the tip of the turkey-wing fan.

"I am glad you have come. You are so fresh and cool in that white dress it's good to look at you. Did you go to the lecture last night? I hear the Mother's Club is made up of old maids and childless married

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women; but as they're the only ones who know anything about children nowadays, it's very proper they should issue edicts concerning them. What was the lecture about?"

"'Lungs and Livers.' And it was fine. It really was. How to breathe properly and how to make your liver behave itself are things few understand, according to Doctor Mallby. I love to hear him. He gets so mad with ignorance and stupidity. You would have enjoyed him."

"I never go to organ recitals." Miss Gibbie waved her fan as if to brush away unpleasant suggestions. "Have you seen anything of the Pryors lately? Some one told me Lizzie Bettie was trying to make her mother and Maria go away. The whole business ought to be separated from each other. Nothing so gets on your nerves as seeing the same sort of faces day after day. And of course they wouldn't think it proper to smile under three months at least."

"They certainly seem to be grieved by their father's death. I had no idea how many people loved Mr. Pryor, or how—"

"Little his family guessed it. They took William for granted, like they take everything else in life. And now it's too late to let him know how they loved him. My dear"—Miss Gibbie leaned forward suddenly—"you love your husband? Then tell him so. If he is a good husband tell him that also. There's nothing a man can stand so much of as praise. A

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woman can make a good husband out of almost any kind of man if she will just go about it right."

"But suppose she doesn't know how? It takes a long time for women to understand men."

"Do they ever?" Miss Gibbie's penetrating eyes were losing no shade of the color rising slowly in Mrs. Burnham's face. "But isn't it because they spend so much time wondering why men don't understand them? The best of men, you believe, are selfish? They are. I am not one of the people who thinks the Lord did such a mighty work when He made man, but if a woman can make up her mind to marry him, it is generally her fault if she doesn't keep his love to the end—"

"Oh, I don't think so!" Mrs. Burnham's voice was vehement in protest.

"Of course you don't. You are a married woman. I am not. I did not say always. I said generally, and I mean what I say. My dear"—again Miss Gibbie leaned forward—"I have been young and now am old, and I have watched many lives. With only occasional exceptions a woman has just about the kind of husband she makes the man she marries become."

"I don't think that, either. A man's character is supposedly formed before he marries; and, besides, a woman ought not to be required to make the kind of husband she wants. She certainly can't make

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him intelligent, or brilliant, or able, just because she wants him to be."

"I never said anything about making a husband intelligent or brilliant or able. Many miserable wives have husbands of that kind. Any woman of sense wants a man of sense—but most of all she wants to be his first thought in life. And when she isn't it's usually because of selfishness or sensitiveness or stupidity on her part."

"But look at the men who are—who are—"

"Who are what?" Miss Gibbie's eyes met Mrs. Burnham's steadily. "Unfaithful? And why? Oh, I know some men should be burned up like garbage taken from the kitchen door, but I'm talking now of the man who starts right, starts loving his wife. If there's anything in him she can make more. The more may not be much, but it's better than the less."

"But how?"

"My dear madam"—the turkey-wing fan made broad and leisurely strokes backward and forward—"you are asking me concerning that with which I have no experience, merely an opinion. I never felt equal to assuming the responsibility of a man, nor was I sure the reward was worth the effort. But listen!" The fan stopped. "Had I been willing to marry I should have felt the blame and shame were mine had I not kept the love my husband gave me and increased it with time."

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Mrs. Burnham leaned forward. Her hands unconsciously clasped tightly.

"Tell me," she said, "how can one do it?"

"In what way, you mean? How should I know? Besides, it would depend on how much the wife loved her husband, how much she wanted to keep his love. The ways would be as varied as the types of man to be dealt with. I've never seen a man who valued anything he got too easily, anything that held itself cheap, and the woman who doesn't inspire some reverence—"

"But you said just now the woman ought to tell her husband how much she loved him."

"Did I? I thought I said she ought to tell him she loved him. Men love to pursue. Something still to be won, something that may be lost, is something he should never forget. Neither should she. I did say just now a man could stand a full amount of praise. I've known good husbands made of mighty unpromising material. A woman of tact and judgment can do much with little. I've seen them do it."

She leaned back in her chair, and in her keen gray eyes was a gleam of the gay twinkle of her youth.

"It isn't bad judgment to make a man believe he is something. He is by nature inclined to it, and a little encouragement is good for most people. So is a better understanding. Most miserable marriages come from misunderstanding, with pride and stubbornness as its cause. I once knew a girl, a very

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wealthy girl, whose health failed shortly after she married. Her husband was young, gay, selfish. Got to leaving her, and she was too proud to let him see she cared. He thought she didn't care, thought her absorbed in herself. One night, coming in late, he saw a light in her room and called good-night on the way to his. She had kept the light, a gas-lamp, by her side, hoping he would come in. There was something she wanted to say, so she wrote in the note she left, but when he passed by she wrote the note, turned her face to the lamp, put out the light and turned on the gas. The next morning they found the note in her hand."

Mrs. Burnham drew in her breath. "How horribly he must have felt!"

"He did. Didn't marry again for thirteen months. The next wife was sensible. There was no more suffering in silence. As her husband he walked upright forever after."

Mrs. Burnham twisted her handkerchief around the handle of her fan. "I feel so sorry for a man when he loses his wife."

"You do what?" Miss Gibbie's voice was little less than a shriek, and she sat upright, her fan at arm's-length.

"Feel sorry—" The look on Miss Gibbie's face stopped her and her own flushed. "Yes, I do," she protested, bravely. "Men are so helpless and they seem so bewildered."

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Miss Gibbie lay back, relaxed and limp, her eyes closed. "My dear child, you are younger than I thought." Her eyes opened as significantly as they had closed, and the turkey-wing fan tapped one pink cheek and then the other.

"My dear, don't worry over widowers. For the first six weeks they are doubtless troubled. They don't know where their clothes belong and they can't find their shoes, and they're learning a great many things they didn't know. But man is recuperative and philosophic. Oh, I don't mean all men. All men are no more alike than all women, only aliker. But you've probably never watched widowers carefully. I have. The transformation that takes place in the ex-husband is something like that in little boys when they first begin to notice little girls. Both use more soap and water, both brush their hair and their clothes more carefully, and select their cravats with more caution, and there isn't a piece of femininity that passes that isn't looked at with speculation in the eye."

She waved her fan with a comprehensive sweep. "Even the most modest of released husbands get inflated. Of course if there are children there are complications, but a woman generally attends to complications. Haven't you ever noticed the way a first-year widower walks? In his own eyes he's a target, and those eyes are always roving to see who is looking his way. He's right, for a good many women

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look. Men have a large capacity for loving, and many of them deserve another chance at happiness."

Mrs. Burnham opened her handkerchief and wiped her lips. Somehow it was shocking, but Miss Gibbie's voice was beyond resistance.

"But surely you think men grieve?" she began.

"Of course I do. Some of them wouldn't change if they could, and all of them hate interruptions. But men are sensible. With them something ended is over, and you can't do business with a broken heart. And business is what man is made for. Business and pleasure."

"I don't think men forget." In Mrs. Burnham's eyes was the far-away look that meant the memory of other days.

"Perhaps they don't. Just cease to remember. Whichever it is, I approve of it, envy it. There are many admirable qualities in men. As I said just now, the average man will make a good husband if he has any encouragement, and all a woman has the right to ask of him is to think of her in life. Men are not much on memories. They want something definite and tangible, and memories are poor company for any one."

Mrs. Burnham looked up. The banter in Miss Gibbie's voice had changed to bitterness, but it was gone as quickly as the shadow that flitted for a moment over her face.

Miss Gibbie pushed back her chair, opened the bag

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hanging from her belt, and took from it a handkerchief of finest thread. "Speaking of company reminds me of Mary, whose uncle and aunt, three children and nurse went home yesterday. She's been like a bird since they've been here. Sang in her sleep one night, she was so happy to have them. But six extra people for three weeks is wearing on flesh and blood, no matter how much you love them, and she's pretty tired. I understand you and Mary are good friends. How did it happen?"

"She made it happen. It was when my baby died." Mrs. Burnham hesitated and her face whitened. "I don't think I could make any one understand what she was to me then. When we came to Yorkburg I was an entire stranger, and for some weeks I met no one except the members of my husband's church. Many of the latter are dear and lovely, but the most interesting from a—"

"Human standpoint. Go on!"

"From a human standpoint were the mill people, the factory people, the plain people, to whom Mr. Burnham is giving his life, and it was in connection with what Miss Cary was doing that we met her. At first I could not do very much to help, and Mr. Burnham was so busy and so interested he didn't know how lonely I was—"

"Of course. So busy making people good he had little time to make his wife happy. And not for the

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world would you have let him seen you were lonely. Been selfish, wouldn't it?"

"Wouldn't it have been?"

"Selfish? No. Sensible. My dear, there are some men whose heads have to be held while an opening is made with a gimlet before they will take a thing in. Your husband is doubtless a good man, but doubtless also dense. How long before your baby was born did you come to Yorkburg?"

"Four months. We had been married six years and I was so happy over its coming that I wanted to help in everything, and tried to do too much. When we got to Yorkburg I had to be very quiet and the days were very long. Miss Cary was one of the first persons who called on me, and several times she took me to drive. Then the baby came. I was very ill for two weeks and was just beginning to get better, when suddenly the baby died."

She stopped. Her handkerchief, twisted into a tight cord, was knotted nervously. "I can't talk of it. I had waited so long, I so wanted a child, a little child of my own, that there was nothing I would not have suffered. But to go down into the valley of the shadow—and come back with empty arms—" She drew in her breath, but her eyes were dry. "Even Mr. Burnham didn't understand. He was distressed and disappointed, but because I got well nothing else seemed to matter much. But he didn't know—no man can know—the awful ache in your heart, the

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awful emptiness of your arms when your baby is taken out of them. One day everything in me seemed to stop. I couldn't feel, or think, or talk. Mr. Burnham must have been frightened, for he got up suddenly and left the room. After a while he came back, then left again, and a few minutes later the door opened and closed, and Mary Cary was inside. As she came toward me I saw she had on no coat or hat. And then she was on her knees by my bed, and I was in her arms and held close to her heart.

"Oh, I can't tell—" Her voice broke in a half-sob she tried to smother. "No one can ever know what it meant to me, but I knew she understood, and suddenly the something that had been tight and cruel snapped, and for the first time tears came."

"I understand, child. I understand." Miss Gibbie patted the twisting hands softly. "Every woman has a corner in her heart she keeps covered. And the thing in life that's hardest is to hold your head up and smile and hide the ache. But it must be held up. That's the woman's part. I'm glad you and Mary are good friends. She tells me you and Mr. Burnham have been a great help to her, and she needs the help you and he can give. I'm about as much use as a shoestring for a buttoned boot. Never could stand smeary people with bad teeth. But possibly I wouldn't take a bath every day, either, if I didn't have a clean tub and hot water, with good soap and towels. Mary says I wouldn't. And if I had to

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cook, and mind babies, and make clothes, and live with a tobacco-chewer and pipe-smoker, and get up before light and hurry him off to a factory, and wash and dress the children for school, and then clean and cook some more, maybe I wouldn't be — quite like I am now. Maybe I wouldn't—"

"I am very sure of it." Mrs. Burnham's laugh was half a sigh. "Poor people make us dreadfully mad at times, and we call them shiftless and improvident and lazy, and some of them are. They are ignorant and untrained. But the woman who is doing the hardest, bravest work in the world to-day is the wife of the workingman, struggling to be respectable and make her children so on wages that often aren't human, much less Christian. When I build a monument it's to be to 'Unknown Mothers.'"

She got up and pushed back her chair. "When are you going away, Miss Gibbie? I'm so glad you are making Mary go with you." She hesitated and with the tip of her parasol outlined the pattern of the rug at her feet.

"Miss Puss Jenkins came to see me night before last and she said such queer things she'd heard." Again she hesitated, and in her face the color rose to the roots of her hair. "I don't suppose I ought to speak of it, but when any one says anything about Mary I get so hot I'm not—"

"What did Puss say?" Miss Gibbie sat upright and the fan in her hand was still.

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"She didn't say anything herself, but it was what Mrs. Deford said that—"

"What did Mrs. Deford say?"

"Miss Puss said she practically admitted her daughter Lily was engaged to Mr. Maxwell, though you'd tried your best to get him for Mary." She stopped. "I didn't mean to tell that. It's too silly to be repeated."

Miss Gibbie lay back in her chair and covered her face with the turkey-wing fan, and from behind it came laughter such as Mrs. Burnham had never heard from her before. "John engaged to Lily Deford! To *Lily Deford!* My dear, he'd much rather be engaged to me. Lily's mother goes with Lily." She put down the fan and wiped her eyes. "Poor Snobby! I've tried to get John for Mary, have I? And she has tried to get him for herself, has she? Though this you don't tell me. I'm afraid as a purveyor of gossip you will never be a success. Puss is a past-master. On your way home just stop at her house, will you, and tell her I want to see her at once."

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XVII

IN WHICH MARY CARY IS PUZZLED

SHE was glad to be alone. The day had been happy, but happiness can only hold weariness in abeyance, not prevent it, and she was very tired. Miss Gibbie had protested against the giving of this party two days before they were to start for their summer holiday. But to go away without letting the children have the long, joyful day in the open would have worried her, and she had insisted on their coming.

Their joy had given her pleasure, and she was glad to have them, but of late she had been conscious of a restlessness too vague to be analyzed, too uncertain to be defined. And yet this restlessness was definite enough to depress, and it was with relief she had stood at the gate and waved good-bye to the last little hand waving in turn to her. Then she had gone back to the house and to the companionship of her understanding friends, the stars.

Watching them, she nodded. "What does anything matter, Mary Cary, if you just can look the

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stars in the face and tell them you've tried? They are going to keep on shining a good many million years after your little day is done, and the thing you are to remember is that they're under the clouds when you can't see them, and you also are to remember—"

The sound of footsteps behind made her turn from the railing of the porch against which she had been leaning and look toward the doorway. Hedwig was coming through it.

"Mr. Ash, he at the telephone is, and he would like much to know if you will him see this evening."

"Indeed I won't!" She looked perplexedly at the woman before her. "I'm so tired, Hedwig. Tell him I'm sleepy and can't see anybody. I mean, tell him I am very busy and have a good deal to do. Tell him anything you want, only don't let him come. I'm going to sit here for a while. Lock up the house and close the windows. If any one else telephones say I'm asleep, or dead, or anything. I'm so cross, Hedwig! Don't mind me, but I want to be alone."

Hedwig hesitated, drew the long, low chair closer to the railing and smoothed the cushions on it, then turned and left the porch. After a moment she came back and, seeing the girl still leaning against the railing, stood by her side and looked at her in silence.

"Is there anything you wish, Hedwig?"

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"No, mein Fräulein. Only"—the fingers of the strong white hands were interlaced—"only you a busy day have had, and busy weeks you have had also. And you have forgot that you of flesh and blood are too made. You think you of spirit are and do not wear out. But everything, it wears out, mein Fräulein, and you are tired more than you know. You have nothing eat all day."

"Oh yes, I have. I ate my lunch with the children. Didn't they have a beautiful time? How many were here, do you think?"

"Will you not in the chair sit?" Hedwig pushed the chair a little closer. "There were of the little orphans sixty-one, and of their minders, five. Can I not your feet rub a little bit, mein Fräulein? You on them have been all the long day."

"You certainly may, and you're a dear to think of it. My feet get so tired, and you know how to rest them so nicely. Thank you, Hedwig."

With an indrawing breath of which she was not conscious, Mary Cary leaned back in the chair and her hands dropped in her lap. On her knees Hedwig knelt and drew off the slippers, and with soft, firm movements, learned in her hospital days, began to rub first one foot and then the other.

"Your feet, they tired get, mein Fräulein, because they are not for the body big enough. Look! I can cover it with my hand! Your body is not large, but your feet"—she laughed as if the thought were

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funny—"your feet is like your heart. They are a child's!"

Mary Cary shook her head. "No, nothing about me is like a child any more, Hedwig. Sometimes I wonder if I ever was one, like other children, I mean When I lived here in the asylum I thought I was a child, but I was only half one then. I played with the children, ate with them, studied and worked with them, but it was only part of me that did it, the outside part. The inside lived in another world, a world I used to make up and put people and things in which were very different from what I saw about me. And then as I grew older I saw so much that seemed hard and unjust and unfair, saw so much that was beautiful and nice to have and yet did not make people happy that I began to wonder and think again, just as I did when I was little, only in a different way. And now sometimes I wonder if I ever was really a child or just somebody always puzzling over something, always wanting to help and not knowing how—just making mistakes."

Hedwig looked up. In her Fräulein's voice was a tone she did not know, and on the lashes of her closed eyes she thought she saw tears. It was something very new and strange, and sudden fear filled her. She could as soon think of the sun shedding darkness as the spirit before her failing, and this apparent surrender to something that hurt and depressed she could not understand.

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"He who does not make mistakes does not do anything. He is an onlooker and a sneerer. Mein Fräulein does much, and the mistakes not yet are many. The good God is helping her, and He in her heart puts wonder as to why things be as they be, and love that she may try them to better make. But He will not like it if she forget herself too much altogether, and remember but the others. Mein Fräulein is very tired to-night."

"But I've no business being tired, Hedwig." Her hands went up to her hair and she fastened the stray strands more securely. "It's been so lovely to have Uncle Parke and Aunt Katherine and the children; and everything is going all right, and my little orphans have had a happy day, and I'm going away on a beautiful trip and— It's just foolishness being tired." She threw back her head. "I'm not tired! Just cross as two sticks, and what about I couldn't even guess. Weren't the children funny and didn't they look nice? You're sure everybody had plenty to eat, aren't you, Hedwig?"

"If they did not a plenty have, mein Fräulein, it was because their little stomachs were not big enough for more. They swallowed all they could hold, but taste is good to the tongue even though there is no more room. They one good day have had, and they will sleep happy and tired to-night. They love you, mein Fräulein. They love you because you have not them forgot, and because you do not forget when

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you, too, were little and unloved and nobody cared. Love it a great thing is."

Mary Cary sat upright and her clear laughter broke the stillness of the soft night air. "Did you talk to that little Minna Haskins, Hedwig, or hear her talk? Her imagination is worse than mine ever was, but memory is her specialty. There's nothing she doesn't remember. She's only eight, but she goes back to the prehistoric without a blink. She certainly had a good time to-day."

"She have. A most very good time. I saw her and I heard her, and she say the queer things for a child. I was giving some of the children sandwiches and lemonade before lunch, and I heard three or four talking so loud and arguing like that I went to see what the matter it was, and guess, mein Fräulein, what that little Minna Haskins she did say?"

"I can't guess. Nobody could guess what Minna would say."

"The children, they were disputing as to what they remembered before they little orphans were, and one, she said she knew when she but four years old was and lived in the country with chickens and eggs and apple-trees like you here have. And another little girl said she could recollect when her father died and they had crêpe on the door, and she was not but three, and then that little Minna Haskins her head did toss, and she said that was nothing, that she remembered perfectly the day she was born. That

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there wasn't a soul in the house but her grandmother, as her mother she had gone out to buy a new hat. And when she came back and saw her there with her hair all curled—her grandmother had curled it—she was so surprised she died from joy, and that's why she's an orphan."

Again Mary Cary's laughter broke the stillness. "What a dreadful thing to remember! Poor little thing! A too-active brain isn't much of a blessing with nothing to direct or control it. That will do, Hedwig. Thank you so much. My feet feel ever so much better; it was just the standing that tired them. But you are dead tired yourself, and there'll be so much to do to-morrow that you ought to be in bed this minute. I'm so glad Miss Gibbie wants you to go, too. You'll be such a help to everybody and the change will do you good."

"I would content be to stay or go, whichever it were the best. But I am glad to be with you." In the doorway she stood a moment, smoothing the folds of her apron, but this time she did not look around.

"Did you get the letter on the desk, mein Fräulein? I thought maybe you did not know it there was."

"Yes, thank you. I saw it. Good-night, Hedwig. And, Hedwig, wake me to-morrow at seven, will you? I have so much I want to do."

As Hedwig went inside the hall the clock near the door struck nine, and, at sound of the clear strokes,

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Mary Cary stirred and changed her position. The night was very still. Through the vines which draped the porch the moon shone calm and cool and serene in a sky as cloudless as a lake of silver, and out of the multitude of stars here and there some glowed so clearly that their points gleamed sharp and bright.

The restful stillness after the noisy day was good, and her eyes closed. For some time she lay back in her chair, and presently the old habit of her childhood asserted itself and, opening her eyes, she nodded as if to some one and began to talk softly.

"Eight months and two weeks you've been back here, Mary Cary, and everybody certainly has been good to you—that is, almost everybody—and you are just as happy as a person has a right to be. You always have known, or Martha has, that nobody can have everything just as they want it, and people will be pecky sometimes, and there will come down days as well as up ones. But you have so much to be thankful for that you'd be a selfish, silly creature, a weak and wicked creature, if you let anything, *anything*, make you the least bit tired or—lonely, or make you wish for—for what you've got no business wishing for. Martha certainly is ashamed of you, Mary. You always did have a horrid habit of asking what's the use of doing this or doing that, and it's pure selfishness and laziness that asks questions of that sort. You might have married money and lived in a big city and given parties to people who didn't want

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to come, but had to just to let the others know they were invited; and you might have had automobiles and Paris clothes, but you watched that and didn't like it." In the darkness she shook her head. "You certainly didn't. You tried it when visiting your rich friends, and then your inquiring nature did have some sense, because it kept on asking inside what it was all for. Nobody seemed to want to go where they went, or to enjoy what they did, and yet they were bored to death at home. The men talked money and the women talked clothes, and everybody seemed to be trying to make a noise so as not to hear something they're bound to hear, and to turn their backs on something that's got to be faced; and you kept looking for the pudding and could only find the meringue, and you don't like meringue much even if it is pretty to see. And then you had the chance to come here. That is, you made up your mind you might help a little here, not being needed specially anywhere else; and then this wonderful offer came. Not one person in forty thousand ever was situated just as you've been, or had what you have to do with. I wonder why more rich people wouldn't rather give their money away while living and get pleasure out of it, than keep it until they're dead for somebody else to fuss over. I guess they hate to give it up until the last minute. It hurts some people to part with what they don't want, much less with what they don't want any one else to have. And I've been so glad to be

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here. People think it's funny my living alone, and Miss Gibbie living in her big house alone. But if we want our dining-room chairs on top the table instead of around it, we like to feel we can have them that way, and nobody to say we can't. As Mrs. McDougal says, 'we're individuals,' and 'it isn't every kind what can congeal in running a house.' Mrs. McDougal says a lot of true things. But John"—she put her hand down and drew from under her belt a letter—"John never said in his life a truer one than that I was so alone here. I've been so busy and happy I didn't know I was alone, but since the big Aldens and the little Aldens went home I've felt sometimes I was just a bit of a boat in a great big sea, and I wasn't sure where I was going, though pulling as hard as I could pull."

She leaned forward in her chair and, with elbows on knees and chin in her hands, looked down upon the floor of the porch and tapped it with her foot.

"But everybody is queer at times. Men are just as queer as women, and John isn't a bit different from the rest. I wonder if there is anybody in the world, *anybody*, who doesn't disappoint you if you know them long enough! There's John." She held the letter between the palms of her hands and tapped her lips with it. "This is the first letter I've had from him in three weeks. Says he is so busy he has no chance to write. Busy! For nearly ten years he's never been too busy. Nobody is too busy to do what

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they want to do. If you can't take time you can always make it. And John is just proving he's only a man. Somehow I thought he wasn't like the rest. But he is. All of them are alike, every single one. And you can just write to him to-night, Mary Cary, and tell him if he's so busy you're sorry he bothered to write at all."

She sat up and took the sheet of paper out of its envelope. "Three pages! Used to write a book. I think John must be crazy. He'd better send nothing than a measly little thing with nothing in it, like that! And going to Norway in August! Mentions it as if it were around the corner." Her face clouded and her brow ridged perplexedly. "I don't understand John. He didn't ask me a thing about it—what I thought of it, or say how long he'd be away, or anything. And Norway is such a long way off."

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XVIII

PICTURES IN THE FIRE

PEGGY looked up into the face laughing down into hers, and the big brown eyes blinked.

"You've got red apples in your cheeks this mornin', Miss Mary, and your eyes is just as shinin' as them ocean waves we saw last summer, when the sun made 'em sparkle in silver splashes. Just as blue, too. I ain't ever seen such blue eyes and long lashes as you've got, but you don't often have real red apples in your cheeks."

"It's the weather. Who could help having red apples in stinging air like this? And who isn't glad to be living when every single tree is dressed in green and gold, or brown and tan, or yellow and red, and the sun is just laughing at you, and dancing for joy? It's such a nice world, Peggy, this world is, if we'll just keep our eyes open to the pretty things in it, and our hearts to its good things. Of course we have to see the ugly ones; if we didn't we might bump into them, and get hurt or soiled or something. But seeing and keeping on looking are very different things.

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Wait a minute, Peggy! Let's stop and take a good breath now we're at the top of the hill. Isn't it lovely up here, and isn't the air delicious? It's good to be living to-day!"

Peggy put her hands on her hips in imitation of the girl by her side, and tried to draw in a deep breath as slowly as she did, but her first effort was not successful, and the exhalation was abrupt. Mary Cary laughed.

"You'll have to practise, Peggy. It isn't easy at first, but our lungs deserve a bath as surely as our bodies, and this is such grand air in which to give it to them. Did you get any chincapins yesterday?"

"Wash and Jeff's hats full. We strung five strings last night and ate the rest. I took Araminta Winters one string. I don't like Araminta. She's a whiney little pussy cat, and sly as a fox, but she's sick and can't go after nuts or anything, and I thought you'd like her to have one. I didn't want her to have it. She told a story on me once and I ain't ever forgot it. I reckon 'twould be a good thing if she was to die."

"Good gracious, Peggy! You sound like a vivisectionist. Araminta's mother wouldn't agree with you. She loves Araminta, if you don't."

"No'm, she don't — that is, she ain't any way crazy 'bout her. Mothers feel bound to love what they've borned, I reckon, but Araminta ain't anything to be dyin' anxious to have around. She's ugly as sin and got sore eyes, and when you see her comin'

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you run if you see her before she sees you. There's a lot of folks like that, ain't there, Miss Mary? Muther say there is."

"Oh, I don't know. If you didn't see the funny side you might run, but I nearly always see the funny side, and all kinds of people interest me."

Peggy shook her head. "All folks ain't got a funny side to see. They're just naturally nasty. Always seein' what's wrong and talkin' about it. Muther say some folks is born to poke for rubbish, and if they can't find a thing mean to say they'll say it anyhow. Crittersizers, I believe she calls 'em. Some who ain't good at anything else is great at that, she says."

"Very true, my solemn Peggy, but you shouldn't know it." Mary Cary laughed. "And if we don't like 'crittersizers,' then don't let's criticise. It was my besetting sin, Peggy, and it took me a long time to learn we all have rubbish in us, and it wasn't a bit hard to see the ugly things in people. And unless we can rake the rubbish out and get rid of it, it doesn't do much good to talk about it. People used to make me so *mad!*"

"Just like they make me now?"

"Do they?" Mary Cary looked down in the sober little face. "Then cut it out, Peggy. If you don't like some people or the things they do and can't change them, then keep out of their way. Don't be nice to their faces and ugly behind their backs.

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That's the most rubbishy thing in the world. There's plenty of room to stay apart."

"That's what you do, ain't it?"

"I?" The surprise in her voice was genuine. "Why, no. I don't stay away from people."

"You didn't go to Mrs. Deford's party Wednesday."

Mary Cary turned to the child beside her. "Who told you I didn't go to Mrs. Deford's party Wednesday?"

"Susie heard Miss Lizzie Bettie Pryor and Miss Puss Jenkins talkin' about it in the store yesterday. Susie says they think she's just air, and the way they lay out people when they're lookin' at hats frightens her. They said they didn't blame you, for Mrs. Deford had never let up on you since you been back. They said she's so crazy for Miss Lily to marry Mr. John Maxwell that she's got him skeered to death, and they believed that's the reason he went to Europe this summer, and they reckon he's hidin' yet, as he ain't been down here lately, not since last May, and this is the last of October."

"He's coming—" Mary Cary stopped abruptly, then she laughed. "It's too splendid to talk about ugly things to-day, Peggy. Let's run to the bottom of the hill and to the big sycamore-tree and then we'll turn in the Calverton road and go home. You are going to stay with me to dinner, and to-night Miss Gibbie is coming to tea, and to-morrow—" She

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reached up and pulled a branch of scarlet leaves from a maple-tree and shook them gayly in the air. "Oh, to-morrow there's lots of things to be done. Here, give me your hand. When I say three, we'll start."

Laughing, panting, glowing, they reached the foot of the hill and then the sycamore-tree, and this time Peggy's face was as full of color as Mary Cary's. For a moment they stood in the radiant sunshine and let the air, crisp and fresh with the sting of autumn, blow on them; then, still hand in hand, went singing down the road and on to Tree Hill.

Some hours later Peggy was gone, and before the crackling logs on the andirons in the library Mary Cary, on her knees, held out her hands to their blaze and nodded to the dancing flames.

"It's so nice to have you, Fire. I love you! You are so warm and cheerful and such good company. And you're such a good thing to dream in and see pictures in and tell fairy tales to. You tell fairy tales yourself. You can be very nice, Fire—but oh, your ashes!"

With the tongs she turned over a log, and out of the willow basket on the hearth took another and laid it carefully on the top. As it sputtered and crackled she sat down on the rug and clasped her hands over her knees, looking with half-shut eyes in the dancing flames, unmindful of their heat or the burning of her face.

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Presently she turned and looked around the room. Twilight had fallen, and only the glint of firelight touched here and there familiar objects, rested a moment lovingly on bit of brass, or flirted hastily away from picture or chair; and as she watched its gleams dart in and out she smiled softly to herself.

"Kisses!" she said. "You dear room! I love you, too!" Into space she kissed her hand, then laughed at her childishness.

"Isn't it nice each season has its own things?" she said, talking to the flames. "In the spring the apple blossoms were so lovely they almost hurt. The trees, the birds, the flowers, everything was so beautiful that I behaved as if I'd never seen a spring before. That's the nice part of spring. It brings its newness every time, and I'm just as surprised as if it were the very, very first. But I believe I love the fall best. It makes you tingle so to do things; everything is worth while, everything is worth doing, everybody is worth helping, and you couldn't help enough to save your life!

"I'm so glad, too, the house is all fixed for the winter. Doesn't it look pretty?" She glanced at rugs and curtains and chintz-covered chairs; at the bowls of brilliantly colored leaves on the top of book-shelves and tables, and sniffed the pungent winter pinks, step-sisters to the proud chrysanthemums in the hall, and again she nodded her head.

"What a happy creature you ought to be, Mary

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Cary! You've got so much; the chance to work, a dear home—"

"Dreaming! In front of the fire and dreaming again! Not the politest of ways to meet your guests, and the front door open as usual. Perhaps you don't know it, but in cold weather doors should be shut!"

"Heigho, Miss Gibbie!" From the rug Mary Cary scrambled to her feet and threw her arms around her visitor's neck, giving her a sounding kiss and a hearty hug. "I'm so glad you've come! You rode, of course, but the wind has bitten your cheeks, and they've got apples in them as red as mine were this morning. Hasn't it been a grand day? Peggy came home with me and we took a long walk, and—"

"If you will stop talking and ring for Hedwig to take my things I'll think more of your manners. You're getting as bad as Buzzie Tate. Some of these days your breath will be lost. What's that I smell in here? Winter pinks? Bless my soul if they're not the same kind I used to pull as a child when I spent the day with Grandmother Bloodgood!" She walked over to the desk and sniffed the flowers upon it. "The very same. Down by the sun-dial they used to be—"

"That's where they are now. I love them. They are so plain and unpretentious. Not a bit like chrysanthemums."

She helped Miss Gibbie off with her coat, untied

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the strings to her bonnet, and took her gloves; then she examined the coat critically.

"You need a new one, Miss Gibbie. This one is downright shabby. When you order your dresses in January you certainly must get a new coat."

"I'll do nothing of the kind. I've only had that coat nine years and it's got to last ten. I have two others, one heavier and one lighter weight, and I seldom wear this. Have no idea of getting another."

"But velvet rubs so, and you don't want people to talk as if—"

"Don't I?" Miss Gibbie sat down in the big chair Mary Cary had pushed for her near the fire, and spread out the full folds of her black silk skirt with deliberate precision. "How do you know what I want people to do? My dear Miss Cary, only dead people don't talk. What we say and what we do, what we wear and where we go, is cause for comment in exact proportion to what we do not say and what we do not do, what we do not wear and where we do not go, with those people who do us the honor of spending their time in discussing us. Just eighteen years ago this November my brain grasped the importance of fully realizing this and the advantage of pleasing one person in this world. To please all is impossible. I would deny no one the pleasure of talking about me."

"It depends on what they say. I don't like people to say things about me that aren't nice." She handed

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Hedwig Miss Gibbie's wraps. "I mean if they aren't true."

"When I hear things said about me that are not nice and are not true I take a lawyer and go to see the person who has said them and call for proofs. When not forthcoming I take away with me a piece of paper testifying that said person has lied. I have two or three little affidavits of that kind in my desk. Things said about me that are not nice and yet are true I let alone, but the other kind—" She waved her hand. "Were there fewer cowards in the world there would be fewer gossips. But what's the matter with my coat? It isn't worn out, and if I got a new one it would be of the same material and the same shape. Not going to get a new one!"

"Are you always going to wear the same shape clothes?" Mary Cary put a log of wood on the fire, then sat down on the rug at Miss Gibbie's feet and smiled in her face. "Aren't you ever going to change?"

"Never! Why should I change? Brain cells weren't meant to be worn out trying to decide between pink and blue or princesse and polonaise. We have to wear clothes, a requirement of custom, but more time, temper, character, and peace of mind, not to mention money, have been sacrificed to them than to any other altar on this green earth, and for what? Most women look like freaks. Their garments are travesties on grace and comfort, and when

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not a pretence in quality are usually a bad imitation of a senseless style. An old sheep dressed lamb-fashion, especially if the old sheep is fat and over fifty, is hard to forgive. When I was fifty I came to my senses, decided on a certain pattern for my clothes, and have been wearing the same kind ever since. In January and June I write to the dress-maker for what I want. One hour twice a year and the work is done. What's the matter with me? Don't I look nice?"

"Very nice. I like those full skirts gathered on to a fitted waist, with your throat open and elbow sleeves. But you can wear velvet and silk and beautiful lace, and fill the front of your dress with tulle. Everybody can't. It takes—"

"Sense and system. You mean money; but the sloppiest-dressed woman in town spends more than I do on clothes, very probably. Wastes it in trash. I get a velvet dress once in five years. Two silks a year, a few muslins, and there I am. Lace lasts forever, and nothing is lost on trimmings. Lack of sense, lack of sense—" she waved her beaded bag in the air—"is what's the matter with the world. Women are slaves of custom; their most despairing quality is their cowardly devotion to the usual and their sheepy following of silly fashions. Woman's vanity and man's pampering of it are the cause of more trouble in most homes than fires and pestilence. Man is to blame for it. Through the ages he's been

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woman's dictator, and being too sensible to wear petticoats and pink ribbons himself, but liking to see them worn, he put them on woman and told her she was pretty in them. That was enough. To please men is what some women think they were made for, and to do it they're content. Women are such fools! What were you dreaming about when I came in? Seeing pictures in the fire, of course. Whatwere they?"

"Guess!" Mary Cary put her arms on Miss Gibbie's knees and laughed in the keen gray eyes. "But you'd never guess! I was thinking how dear everything is here and how I love it. There isn't but one thing more I'd like in the house. Just one. And I was wondering if you'd mind if I had it. You knew poor little Mrs. Trueheart was dead, didn't you?"

"Yes, but you don't want her ghost, do you?" Miss Gibbie nodded toward the face which had nodded toward hers. "Do you want a spook in the house?"

"No—a baby—she left one five weeks old. Can I adopt it, Miss Gibbie? Would you mind? Sometimes I get so lonely—I mean, I just love a little baby, and this poor little thing hasn't any mother, and its father drinks, and the oldest girl has more than she can do for the other children." She gave a deep, eager breath. "I'd love a little baby so, Miss Gibbie. I'd rather hold one in my arms and rock it to sleep than dance all night, and I like to dance. I never did understand how mothers could let nurses

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put their babies to bed. I just love to hold them and squeeze them *tight!*" She pressed her arms close to her bosom and, bending, kissed the hollow which they made; then looked up again. "Would you mind if I took this little Trueheart baby? Hedwig and I could take care of it and—"

Miss Gibbie leaned back in her chair; her eyes closed in hopeless resignation, and her hands fell limp in her lap.

"Wants—to—adopt—a—baby! Trueheart baby—mother dead of consumption and father death-proof—an alcohol inoculate! What sense the Lord saw fit to give you, Mary, He seems at times to take away. I thought time would help you, but you're still a child—still a child!"

Mary Cary shook her head. "I'm not a child; I'm a woman. But why can't I have it? The cost wouldn't be much and I can afford it, and I'd just love to have it." She held out her arms. "See," she said, "they were meant to hold a baby, and they ache for one sometimes. This is such a delicate little thing—it's a little girl. And I—once there wasn't anybody to take care of me, and I had to be an—I don't understand why you'd mind—"

"You don't, and I'm not going to try to make you. Some things are not to be explained. Did you say we were to have tea? I always have my tea at four, and it's nearly six. Where's Hedwig? She at least can understand when I say I want Tea!"

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XIX

THE TESTIMONY PARTY

N the name of love and charity!" Miss Gibbie turned to the door behind her. "What is it? Can't a person have one hour undisturbed in this world? I'm not half through what I had to say, though evidently through all I'll have a chance to say. What on earth! Is it Christmas or the Fourth of July or—"

Mary Cary got out of the chair in which she had been sitting since supper and went over to the window. "I don't know what it is. I thought this was the twenty-ninth of October, but from the noise it may be election night." She put her hands to her eyes shielding them from the light, and looked through the pane of glass. "There's a big covered wagon coming up the drive; it's at the steps." She threw back her head and laughed. "Come quick and look! they're piling out like rats from a trap. Did you ever! What in the world is it? They're on the porch now. Hedwig has opened the door and—if there isn't Mrs. McDougal with a great big something in her hands,

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and Mr. Milligan, and Peggy, and Mr. and Mrs. Jernigan, and Jamie, and little Minna Haskins, and Mr. Flournoy. What do you suppose it is?"

Miss Gibbie got up and stood by the table in the middle of the room. "The gods couldn't guess if Mrs. McDougal has anything to do with it. Are they coming in?"

The question was answered by the tread of feet in the hall, and the procession, headed by Mrs. McDougal, began to enter the library door. On the threshold she stopped, bowing and smiling, in her hands a large glass salver, on the top of which was an even larger cake elaborately decorated in pink icing, in whose centre was stuck one tall white candle which sputtered and blinked in the changing draughts Behind her a row of men and women, with a child occasionally between, stretched to the hall door and into the porch, and for the first time in her life Mary Cary could find nothing to say. She knew suddenly what it meant.

Mrs. McDougal advanced and, with arms extended, made a profound bow. "Miss Mary Cary, Our Friend! And Miss Gibbie Gault, Her Friend! Good-evening!"

The precious burden was laid on the table, the candle straightened, and also her hat; then she turned to the crowd behind with a hospitable wave of her hand. "Come in, people! Come in! Those what can't sit, must stand. Take this chair, Mis'

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Jernigan; she's been sick, you know"—with a nod to Miss Gibbie—"and if you'll be excusin' of my sayin' so for you, Miss Mary, I'll just say, make yourselves to home the best you can while we say what we come for. Make yourselves to home!"

"Oh, of course!" Mary Cary caught her breath. "Please pardon me. I was so surprised to see you—and I'm so glad. Do sit down, Mrs. Jernigan." She pushed the latter in a low easy-chair. "Bring some more chairs, Hedwig. Get them anywhere. I'm so glad to see all of you. How do you do, Mr. Milligan—and Minna." She stooped and kissed the child holding tight a folded paper in her hand. "Did they let you come, too? Isn't it nice?"

"Ain't ever been out at night before since I was an orphan." Minna gave a squeal of happy joy. "But I used to go to parties and thayters and balls. I remember every one of them." She turned to Mrs. McDougal excitedly. "Must I give it to her now?"

"No, you mustn't!" Mrs. McDougal grabbed the hand the child was about to extend and held it tight. "'Tain't time yet, Minna; 'tain't time yet. Mr. Milligan is master of ceremony and he'll tell you. You keep quiet if you can. Here, Peggy, hold on to Minna; she'll pop if you don't. How you do, Miss Gibbie? How you do?"

Miss Gibbie's hand was shaken heartily, but she was not permitted to say how she did, for Mrs. McDougal had more to say herself, and with a wink

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she went on: "We knew you was goin' to be here. Peggy told us. I certainly am glad of it." She put her hand to her mouth and made effort to whisper. "I ain't a fool, if I ain't edjicated. Brains don't know whether they're high born or low, or whether they're male or female, and they can take in more'n you think without bein' told. I'm not forty, and mine ain't set yet. But set yourself down, Miss Gibbie; set yourself down, while I go see if they're all in."

They were all in, twenty or more of them, and as Mrs. McDougal stood in the centre of the room, counting with extended forefinger, Miss Gibbie took her seat, and from her beaded bag took out surreptitiously a small bottle of salts and hid it in her handkerchief. The room was crowded and would soon be close, but an open window could not be asked for. The salts must do.

For most of the unexpected guests chairs had been hastily provided by Hedwig, and the few men standing were doing so from choice. As she finished counting, Mrs. McDougal stepped back and stood by Mary Cary's side.

"We are all here," she said. "Not a one was spilt out the wagon, but 'twas so crowded I was 'fraid some might be jolted off the ends. We come in Mr. Chinn's undertakin' wagon." She nodded explanatorily to Miss Gibbie. "He lent it to us, but not bein' built for picnics, 'twa'n't the best in the

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world to pack twenty-three shovin' people in, bein' meant for just one still one; but my grandmother always told me a lot of life was a makeshift, and if you couldn't do what you'd like, then like what you had to do; and we had a lot of fun comin' out. Just like Congressmen goin' to a funeral. But I reckon you wonder what we come for?" This time she turned to Mary Cary. "We come to tell you something. Mr. Milligan, he's goin' to preside, but before he begins I just want to say that this is a sort o' birthday for Yorkburg, and that's why the cake is here." She turned to it proudly, and her right hand made a wide sweep. "We all help give it, and a lot more would have helped if they'd known, but we didn't have time to tell everybody, and if feelin's are hurt we can't help it. Never was a party somebody's feelin's didn't get hurt."

She stopped and made a bow. "Miss Mary Cary and Miss Gibbie Gault, maybe you don't know it, but this is the twenty-ninth day of October, and just one year ago to-day you came back here to live permanent, which is why there's one candle on the cake. It's been a good year for Yorkburg and a better one for some of the people in it, and that ain't always the case when returners come back, for most folks who live in a place ain't much use to it, and the day after the funeral is forgot. And knowin' there's a lot of hard licks in life, and no matter how much you try to do for people they'll do you if they get a chance, and

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say mean things about you—for there ain't nobody what escapes the havin' of misjudgin' things said if they've got a mind of their own and the will to do their way—we thought we would like to come out here and tell you before you was dead that we sure do love you and we thank you hearty for comin' back. You've done a lot for us, Miss Mary, by just rememberin' we was livin' and comin' to see us like we was folks, and like it was really true the Lord died for us as well as others. Some don't seem to think so. You've helped us take hold of ourselves, and though some of us ain't much to take hold of, still a lot of people die slow of discouragement, and a cheerin' word beats the best pill on earth. I ain't much on oratory, and not well acquainted with fine speech. Plain English is all I can use, and the plain English of all of us is we love you, and we thank you and we want you to know it. My grandmother always told me if you had anything like that to say, to say it while the person you think it about could hear. Dead people can't. And 'tain't much use cryin' and handin' out their good qualities after they're gone, like they was their clothes, for which they ain't got any more need, because 'tis too late. And you can't sleep good when you think of the things what's too late.

"But I ain't here to make a speech, just to bear testimony. This ain't a party exactly, unless it's a testimony party, and if I don't set down my tongue

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will run all night, bein' loose-jointed and good for goin' all the time like most women's, and so I take my seat and turn the meetin' over to Mr. Milligan. He's Irish, and an Irishman can talk a cabbage into a rose any day. And when he's got a rose to talk about"—her hand made a wide sweep—"his own tongue couldn't tell what it might say after it starts. Mr. Milligan will come forward and begin the presidin'."

To loud applause Mrs. McDougal took her seat, and Mr. Milligan, in obedience to orders, advanced and bowed, first to Mary Cary, then to Miss Gibbie, and then to the room at large.

"It's the truth she's said, Miss Mary," he began, smilingly, "for she's gone and expressed what I was going to say, and my tongue must tell of something else. A man oughtn't ever to let a woman speak first. She'll steal his thunder and leave nothing for him to say. He can't help her speaking last. No law could prevent that, but first and last ain't fair. She has told you why we're here, and I am only going to add that anybody who takes a weed out of a place and puts in a flower ain't lived in vain, and anybody who shows you where the sunshine comes from and how to get it is the kind of helper the world is looking for, and the person who can hearten you is the one who finds an open door in any house. And you've done every one of them things, every one. Mrs. McDougal has told you how the Mill-ites and the

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Factory-ites and the Sick-ites and the Tired-ites and the—"

"Orphan-ites." It was Minna's shrill little voice that filled Mr. Milligan's pause as he hesitated for another ite, and she shook the paper at him excitedly.

"The Orphan-ites." He bowed toward the quivering child. "Mrs. McDougal has told you what these feel, and thanked you for all of them, and I am here as a member of Yorkburg's council to thank you again for what you have done for the town in stirring of us up. Everything you jolted us about is coming on well, and the public baths at Milltown, the gift of your unknown friend, will make for godliness next summer, if they don't do much in cold weather. And if we can get hot water they may help the cause of righteousness this winter. We hope we are going to keep you here forever, but as there ain't many marrying men to match you in these parts it ain't impossible that in time you may go away, and if that time should come 'twould be a sorrowful day for many in this town. But if it should please you to stay single and live with us we'll thank God for an old maid like you, and pray Him to make more of your kind. The world needs 'em. And now Mr. Jernigan will speak for the mill, and his son Jamie for the children, and Minna Haskins for the orphans. Mr. Jernigan, ladies and gentlemen!"

As Mr. Jernigan came forward Mrs. McDougal

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pulled Mary Cary from the table upon which she had been half sitting into the chair at her side. "Set down, Miss Mary," she said in a half-whisper. "You look like a pink peony turnin' purple. Anybody would think you warn't even a sinner saved by grace, you're that abject. You ain't doin' nothin' sinful. Set up and take your posies like a lady. You look like you're takin' punishment, that you do!"

Mr. Jernigan's speech was largely lost between the clearing of his throat and the blowing of his nose, and more time than words was used in its delivery. But he managed to bring greetings from his fellow-workmen, and, as he sat down, Miss Gibbie led the vigorous applause which followed, and nodded encouragingly to his wife, who had hung proudly and anxiously upon his disconnected sentences.

Next came Jamie, lame Jamie, who hobbled bravely forward on his crutches, his little white face pinched by pain, full for once with happy glow, and, as he placed them against the table, irresistibly Mary Cary's hand went out to his and she held it tight.

"An orignal poem by Master James Jernigan," announced Mrs. McDougal, half rising from her seat and waving her hand in Jamie's direction. "Made up and writ by himself."

Jamie's head bowed, then he looked at his mother, flushed and eager, whose lips were already making the movements of the words he was to utter, then at the girl by his side, and, with another bow, began:

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"I'm just a little boy who's lame,
And couldn't used to walk a step.
But now I can, and I will tell
How me and my fine crutches met.

'Twas on a clear day and the bells they were ringing,
And I in my bed could hear the birds singing.
But I couldn't to church or to anywhere go,
For my legs couldn't walk, not to save my life.

And then Miss Mary she came in,
And said, 'Why, Jamie, 'tis a sin
You can't go out like other boys.
I'll go and get you some new toys.'

And when she came back the toys they were crutches
And a chair I could wheel myself in.
And now maybe I can play like other boys some day.
'Cause the pain is near 'bout well, and I can holler
when they play.

And for all little children who ain't here to say
They think she's just grand and a dear,
I will just say for all, if she marries at all,
We'll kill him if of her he don't take good care."

A stamping of feet and loud clapping of hands greeted this first effort of a youthful poet, and, as he started to go back to his seat, Mary Cary drew him to her and made him share her chair.

"Oh, Jamie, Jamie," she whispered, her face hid-

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den behind the tumbled brown curls, "how could you write such fairy tales! They were beautiful verses, Jamie, but you know they were not true. They—"

"Yes'm, they was." Jamie's head nodded affirmatively. "They was true as truth. Look there—that little Minna Haskins is goin' to speak."

Minna's time had come at last. In Peggy's lap she had been wriggling through the other speeches, shutting her eyes at intervals and repeating under her breath the words she was to say, and when her name was called she ran forward joyously, holding tight in her hands the precious document with which she had been intrusted. Arms at her sides and heels together, she bowed, then shook the paper in the air.

"It's on here," she said, "what I'm going to say. A committee wrote it. Three of the girls they learned it to me. And it's to be yours, Miss Mary, forever and ever, because it's res'lutions." She held out the paper, then drew it back. "I forgot—I wasn't to give it to you till I was through. I'll begin." And like water out of a pitcher the words poured forth:

"Whereas, it has pleased Almighty God to put in our midst a beautiful young lady who once lived here herself and has never forgot about it, and loves little children and does all she can to make them happy, and don't like ugly clothes and the same kind of food and monot'nous living, but believes orphans

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are just like other children inside and out except they haven't fathers and mothers and anybody much, and she knows how that feels, and,

"Whereas, she came back to this very old town, most all history and some factories, and has helped a lot and got some things changed, and gives parties and picnics now and then, and,

"Whereas—" She stopped suddenly and her voice fell. "Whereas oughtn't to come there. There ain't but three whereases, because Sallie Green copied them out of a paper when Mr. Joynes died, just changing to suit a live person, and the last one comes way down. Wait a minute!" She shut her eyes tight and mumbled rapidly to herself, then looked up triumphantly. "And gives picnics now and then and makes us feel like human beings though she's right managing at times and don't allow impertence, and,

"Whereas, we love her fit to die,

"Therefore, be it resolved that we will tell her so and tell her she'll never know how much, and we thank her and thank her and thank her.

"And a copy of these res'lutions is ordered to be spread on paper and on her heart, and we will spread them on ours.

"KITTY MOUNTCASTLE
"JESSIE ROYALL
"MARGARET POTTS
"AND ME."

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The last two words were emphasized by a low bow, then, turning, she ran into Mary Cary's outstretched arms, and threw hers around her neck.

"Oh, Miss Mary, I'm so glad I've said it, and I didn't miss but once. Here they are!" The paper was thrust in her hand. "I didn't help write these, but I wrote some once when my grandfather died. I remember just as well—"

"Minna, Minna!" Mary Cary lifted the excited little face from her shoulder and kissed her lips. "Your grandfather died before you were born, but you remembered splendidly to-night. I don't see—"

"Pooh! That wasn't anything!" Minna's eyes were raised to the ceiling. "All I've got to do is to hear a thing and I can say it. I can say Shakespeare if you want me to."

Mary Cary got up. "Mercy, no! Don't say anything else if you love me. Run back to Peggy and keep still for just a minute more." She stood at the table, looking at Mrs. McDougal speaking to Hedwig, who a moment later came back with a large knife and handed it to her, and, as she took it, Mary Cary dropped back into her chair.

Flourishing the knife, Mrs. McDougal advanced to the cake, then turned to the others sitting stiff and upright in their chairs, and bowed again. "The ceremonies is over and the cake will be cut. And then maybe you'll open your mouths and say some-

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thing. You're settin' like you're at a funeral. Them resolutions sounded like it, but you mustn't mind them, Miss Mary"—she turned to the latter in a whisper—"they didn't have much time to make up anything, and I asked Miss Samson just to let 'em say something from their hearts, and they thought resolutions was more dignified than plain every-day speech, and more respectful. I asked for a testimony and for Minna Haskins to say it. She's such a little devil and so fond of you. Maybe now you'd like to say something yourself?" She rapped on the table for silence. "Miss Mary Cary would like to say something, and when she's through we'll eat."

For half a moment Mary Cary leaned against the library table, her hands behind her clasping it with an intensity of which she was not conscious, and for a moment more words would not come. Slowly the hot color died out of her face and her lips quivered.

"No," she said, presently. "No. I can't say anything. When we feel much we can say little, and I couldn't tell you how you have—have humbled me; but I do thank you for your kind, kind words. It is not I you should thank, however. I have done so little. I could have done nothing had it not been for Yorkburg's friend. I had nothing to give but—"

"Love, which is what few have, judging by the sparse way it's handed out." Mrs. McDougal

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stuck the knife in the cake and left it there, then waved her hand. "Go on! Go on!"

"I had only—love to give when I came back, and love by itself can't do what it would. It needs money to help. Money without love may not be much, but love with money—" Her voice broke.

"Is hard to beat. Just tell your friend we thank him hearty, or her if it's a her. When love and money married get, their children will be great, you bet." Mrs. McDougal threw back her head, and her hearty laugh was joined in by none more heartily than Miss Gibbie, who used the opportunity to put her handkerchief to her nose and keep it there awhile. "Bless my soul, if I ain't made a rhyme! Thirty-seven and never did it before! Luck and accidents come to all, my grandmother used to say, and when I speaks poetry on the spot it's both together. I'm real proud of myself, that I am! That's all right, Miss Mary; don't you try to say nothin'. We understand you, and we just want you to understand us." She pulled her by the sleeve. "There's Miss Hedwig standin' in the door lookin' at you. Goodness gracious! If she ain't gone and set a spread on the dining-room table, and me ready to cut the cake this minute! Looks like we're goin' to have a party, after all. Miss Mary, you blow out this candle, and I'll light it again when we get in the dining-room." She dropped her voice. "Here, get behind me and wipe your eyes if you want to. Got a handkerchief?

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Ain't our eyes funny? Trickle when there ain't a bit of sense in it. Are you through?" She lifted the cake triumphantly. "My! but I'm glad I'm livin'! If there's anything I do love in life 'tis a party, and I ain't been to one since I married McDougal, and that's more'n nineteen years ago!"

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XX

A SUDDEN CHANGE

DULL gray skies, a sobbing wind, and rain falling in monotonous regularity greeted the day following the testimony party. The contrast in temperature and condition was not cheerful, and as Mary Cary stood upon the porch looking down the road which led to Yorkburg she shivered in the damp, cold air, then breathed deeply that her lungs might have their bath.

"It's between the twenty-four hours that all the changes in life come, I suppose, but a change like this makes yesterday seem ages ago. Was it really *yesterday* Peggy and I ran like the King of France down hill and up again? and just last night we had that dear, queer, precious party?"

She sighed happily and began to walk up and down the porch. "It's too bad John and Mr. Fielding should happen to be here together. John despises Mr. Fielding. I don't wonder. When he shakes hands with me I'm so afraid he'll hear me shiver I hold my breath. And yet he's a very gener-

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ous man. If I'd allow him he'd give me any amount needed for any object. I'd as soon allow him to give me poison as a check for library, or baths, or the asylum, or anything else in Yorkburg. I'm sorry he's here, but I couldn't prevent his coming, not knowing he intended doing so until he arrived. And John just wrote day before yesterday he'd be here to-day. I haven't been very polite to Mr. Fielding, but he has no reason to expect me to be polite. I've told him I would never marry him and there wasn't the slightest use in coming here, but I might as well talk to the wind. If for him there's to be transmigration, he'll be a rubber ball next time. He's as persistent as John—that is, as John used to be. For nearly six months John has forgotten he ever wanted to marry me. I understand he and Lily Deford have become great friends. Mrs. Deford never loses an opportunity of telling me so."

She threw back her head and laughed. "Lily Deford! What on earth does he talk to her about? Hand embroidery and silk stockings are Lily's specialties, and she rarely gets beyond either in words or deeds. She's a pretty little powder puff, and I'd feel sorry for her if she wasn't so ma-ridden and spineless. But if John enjoys her—" She shut her eyes tight, a trick caught unconsciously from Miss Gibbie, then turned and went indoors. And in the hall Hedwig heard her humming cheerfully as she put on raincoat and overshoes and made ready for a walk to town.

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An hour later the meeting called in Mr. Moon's office to settle certain matters relating to the recent planting of trees was over, and, leaving the mills, Mary Cary turned into King Street. The driving rain of the morning had slackened somewhat, but the street was deserted, the hour being that of Yorkburg's dinner, and as she neared the upper end nothing was in sight but a stray dog whose wet tail flapped in dejected appeal for the door before which he stood to be opened.

"You poor thing!" She stooped and patted the shivering creature. "I've felt sometimes like you look, but I hope I'll never look like you feel." The door was opened, and with an extra flourish of tail and a yelp of gratitude the dog disappeared, and again she started up the street.

Only the drip of the rain, the trickle of water in the gutters, and the flap of the torn awning in front of the drug store broke the sullen stillness, and then some distance ahead she saw a man and a woman, under an umbrella held close to their heads, coming slowly toward her. The slowness of their walk caught her attention, but the intentness of their talk made them unconscious of her approach, and not until she was quite near them was the umbrella held by the man lifted so that she could see who he was. She stopped suddenly as if hit, and in her face the color surged so hotly that the damp air stung.

"Why, Mary!" John Maxwell's umbrella dropped

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to the ground, and with hat in his left hand he extended his right in frank joy at seeing her. "What in the world are you doing out on a day like this?"

"Enjoying myself." The hand held eagerly toward her was barely touched. "How do you do, Lily? Are you out for fun, too?"

"Oh no! I'm out for—" She turned helplessly to the man beside her. In his face the color had leaped as swiftly as it had in Mary's, but in his it died as quickly as it came, and her cool greeting whitened it. "I came out to get some embroidery cotton number thirty-six from Simcoe's and met Mr. Maxwell coming from the inn. He was—"

"Fortunate to meet you. When did you get in, John?" She asked the question as if for the time of day, opened her bag, took from it her handkerchief, and wiped her face. "I believe my umbrella leaks. My face is actually wet."

"I got in yesterday afternoon. I went by to see Miss Gibbie and heard she was spending the evening with you."

"So he came to see us. Wasn't it good of him?" And Lily, whose slow brain was confused by an undefined something she could not understand, looked first at one and then the other. "I wanted mam-ma to send for Mr. Brickhouse so we could play cards, but she wouldn't do it and went to bed by nine o'clock. Mam-ma never will play cards with Mr. Maxwell; says he's too good a player. But won't

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you come in some evening while he's here, Mary, and play with us? I'll get five more people and that will make two tables. Mr. Maxwell is going to stay some time."

"Is he?" Mary Cary fastened the buttons of her left glove, then held her umbrella straight, as if to go on. "I'm sorry I can't come in for cards while he's here, but I don't care for cards." She laughed lightly and nodded. "Too bad I've kept you standing in the rain. Good-bye!" And she started off.

"Hold on a minute, Mary!" Hat still in hand, John handed the umbrella to Lily Deford and took a few steps behind her. "What time are you going out this afternoon? I'll come by for you. May I stay to tea? I must see you this evening."

"Must you?" She shook the rain off her umbrella. "I'm sorry, but I have an engagement this evening."

He looked at her as if not understanding. "You mean I can't come?" His face flushed, and a quick frown swept over it.

Her shoulders shrugged slightly, a movement she knew he disliked. "If you prefer to so put it—that is what I mean."

His clear gray eyes were searching hers as if what he had heard was unbelievable. "Your engagements must be very imperative. I have not seen you for nearly six months and naturally my time here must be short."

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Mary Cary looked up, and the smile on her face was one he did not know. "Short? I understood Lily to say a minute ago you would be here some time."

"Lily knows nothing about it."

"No?" Again her eyebrows lifted. "She seemed to speak with authority. But whether she did or not, it is hardly kind to keep her standing in the rain. Don't you think you had better go back to her?"

"I think I had." He looked down, and then again in her baffling eyes. "You haven't on your overshoes. Your feet are soaking wet."

She too looked down. "I started out with them. Guess I left them in Mr. Moon's office. Are you sure Lily has on hers?"

"I don't know whether she has or not. Lily can take care of her own feet."

"And I of mine. Standing on wet ground isn't good for them. Good-bye!" And with a half-nod she walked on up the street.

What was it? What was the matter with her? Her blood was pounding through heart and brain, and the damp air on her face only added to its burning. In her eyes was an angry light, and she bit her lips lest they make movements of the words which sprang to them.

"Got here yesterday! Didn't come out, didn't telephone, spent the evening at the Defords', and with Lily the first thing this morning. Wants to

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see me this evening!" Her head went up. "I guess not. His time will probably be short. With me it will certainly be short. What did he come for if only to stay a little while?" In her face indignation faded into incredulity and her lips curved. "To see the little powder puff, I suppose! Well, he can see her. I'll certainly not take his time. For nearly six months it has pleased him to stay away, to write scraps of letters at long intervals, to send nothing, do nothing that he used to do. And now he comes back and expects me to receive him with outstretched arms. He expects wrong!"

She reached the Moons' gate, hesitated, and walked on. Lunch was to be taken with them, but the sudden transition from expected sensations to the unexpected made it best to stay in the cold air a while longer, and without a look toward the house she passed it hurriedly.

What was the matter with John? For ten years he had been the friend who never failed—the friend to whom she could always turn and know what to find; the one to whom subconsciously all things were referred, and who, without always agreeing with her, always stood by her. What was the matter with him?

Walking as if to catch a train, and yet without looking where she was going, she turned into Pelham Place and neared Miss Gibbie's house. Her eyes were upon it in indecision, and not seeing the puddle

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of water ahead, she stepped into it and splashed well with mud the low shoes and thin stockings she was wearing. The sudden chill provoked her, and she looked down at her wet feet.

"Of course he saw I had on no overshoes. He always sees the things I leave off and don't do and thinks I'm nothing but a child. Suppose I am! What business is it of his whether I wear overshoes or not? What business is it of his what I do or where I go or what I say? We are nothing to each other!"

The thought stopped her. For a moment she shivered in the damp, penetrating wind, then hurriedly passed Miss Gibbie's house. She would not go in. No one must see her until she grew calmer. But what was she angry about? She didn't know, only—only for weeks she had been looking forward to John's coming. She had expected him the first of October, but the month passed and he had not come. Then came a hurried note merely saying he would reach Yorkburg on the thirtieth, and the vague unrest of past days faded. She hadn't been as nice to John as she ought to have been, had taken too much as a matter of course perhaps, but this time she was going to be really very good. There were many things to talk over, and she wanted, too, to hear about his trip. She had visited Norway, but the stay was short, and she would like to go again. She had honestly intended to be very nice, and only

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a few hours ago she had talked with Hedwig about supper, deciding on the things John liked best. And now—

She laughed, and for the first time in her life her laughter had a bitter tinge.

"Good-morning! The girl worth while is the girl who can smile, when the rain—"

She looked up. The man in front of her was blocking her way. He touched his hat, but did not lift it, and at sight of him she frowned. There were times when she loathed Horatio Fielding.

"Good-morning!" Her tone was short, then, a sudden thought occurring, she changed it. "You evidently like to walk in the rain as much as I do. Suppose you come out to tea to-night. I was going to telephone, but this will save time." She started to pass on. "We have tea at seven."

"I'll be there. In front of your fire is the place for me. But can't I walk with you? You seem in an awful hurry this morning."

"I am. Have an engagement. Will see you to-night." And as if to escape what was unendurable she hurried on, and again turned into King Street.

"Two stories in half an hour is doing well for one who hates a lie as nothing on earth is hated," she said under her breath, holding the umbrella close down over her head. "A little more time and you may lie without effort. You told John you had an engagement. I thought I did, with him. And you had no

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more idea of telephoning Mr. Fielding before you saw him than of telephoning the— I'd much rather telephone the latter. He'd certainly be more entertaining and far more polished. It isn't Mr. Fielding's dulness that is so unpardonable, but his horrible cocksureness and insufferable assurance. He doesn't eat with his knife, but only from obvious restraint, and in an unguarded moment he'll do it yet. He could never be convinced that if a woman had fine clothes and carriages and bejewelled fingers and throat that she could wish for something else. To him a woman is property." She drew in her breath. "After a visit from him I need prayers and want incense. And I've asked him to eat John's supper to-night!"

The wind had changed, and the rain, coming down in heavy, shifting sheets, beat upon her umbrella with such force that only with difficulty could it be held. Her feet were wet, loose strands of hair, damp and breeze-blown, brushed in irritating tappings across her face, and as she again neared Mrs. Moon's house she knew she must go in.

Sarah Sue had seen her coming, and the door was opened when she reached it. "What in the world made you go by here half an hour ago instead of coming in?" she asked, taking the umbrella and helping off with the raincoat. "I knocked on the window and called you, but you didn't hear. Aren't your shoes wet? Soaking! Come right on up to

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my room and put your feet on my fender and get them good and hot. My slippers and stockings are too big, but you can keep them on until yours are dry. I don't understand why you didn't come in first."

Sarah Sue led the way up-stairs, followed by Mary Cary, who had submitted to comments and questions and the off-taking of wraps without reply, but halfway up the steps she stopped and turned back.

"A package was left here for you just now," she said. "I'd better give it to you before I forget." She took up the bundle on the hall-table and came back with it.

"What is it?" Mary's voice was indifferent as she broke the wrapping; then as she saw the writing on it she frowned. "It's nothing—just my overshoes." She threw them down the steps and under the table from which Sarah Sue had taken them.

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XXI

THE RELEASE

ON the fifteenth of each October the turkey-wing fan, rarely out of Miss Gibbie's hands in warm weather, was put away in camphor, and on that evening knitting-needles and white Shetland wool were brought out. In a basket of rare weaving these materials now lay on the library table near which Miss Gibbie sat, but as yet they were untouched, for before the open fire her hands lay idle in her lap. Every now and then she lifted first one foot and then the other and put it on the fender, and presently she drew closer the tall screen with its framed square of tapestried lambs and shepherdess wrought by her grandmother's fingers many years ago. Placing it so that her face might be protected from the scorching heat of the dancing flames, she tilted it at the right angle, and then tilted her head also.

"No use blistering my face because young people prefer to be fools!" she said, presently. "And what fools! You might have known, Gibbie Gault, you'd make a mess of it if you put your finger in a lovers'

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pie. If life has taught you nothing else it has taught you to let people do their own paddling, and yet at your age you tried to steer a man in a way he didn't want to go. You thought it was the wisest way, and in the end would bring him to the promised land, but your mistake lay in not letting him fall overboard the way he preferred to fall. A man would rather fail according to his own ideas than succeed according to another's. And you certainly can't say this little arrangement of yours concerning John and Mary has proven a brilliant one. Of the three simpletons, just at present, you deserve what's coming to you more than the other two, for better than they you understand that woman is an unknown quantity. Even her Maker couldn't anticipate her behavior, and when she wills to torment a man she has seemingly neither soul nor sense. In your wise and worldly advice to John you forgot Mary's possibilities of denseness, and your meddlesome medicine has had the wrong effect."

She sighed queerly and changed the left foot on the fender to the right, and again tapped the arms of her chair with the tips of her delicately pointed fingers. "What a silly, sensitive little thing this self-love, this pride of ours, is! And it's Mary's hardiest sin. She wouldn't let the angels of heaven take her up to-day and put her down to-morrow, and while she laughs at much in life, there are certain things she doesn't smile at. A friend who fails in her eyes

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isn't even in a class with toads. She has an idea that John is no longer the friend of old. She does not say so, has apparently forgotten he's living, rarely mentions his name, and doesn't know that my old eyes see clearly how gayly miserable she is. I have pretended to be blind, and have encouraged the idea that John was interested in that pink-and-white offspring of Snobby Deford. What a bunch of idiots we all have been, and I the biggest of all—the biggest of all!"

At the library door Celia stood, hand on knob. "Mr. Maxwell is here, Miss Gibbie. Will you see him?"

"I will." Miss Gibbie leaned back in her chair, put her feet on the stool in front of it, and crossed her hands in her lap. "And bring in tea at once."

"It is good of you to let me see you." John Maxwell bent over the beautiful hand held out to him, but the boyish banter of other days was gone. Before Miss Gibbie was no pretence, and his face was that of a man who no longer has time to waste or the will for wasting.

"Not good at all. If you hadn't come I should have sent for you." She tilted the screen at a different angle. "Sit down, and sit where I can see you. But first put that table a little closer to me. Here's Celia with the tea."

The table was moved and the large silver tray with its little silver legs was placed upon it, the lamp

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under the kettle lighted, and Celia waved out, and again Miss Gibbie leaned back.

"What day did you get here?" she asked. "Time has such a somersault way of passing, one can't keep up with it. How long have you been here?"

"Ten days. I came on the twenty-ninth, and this is the eighth of November."

"When are you going away?"

"I don't know." John crossed his right leg over his left, shifted his position and shaded his eyes with his hand.

Miss Gibbie took up the tea-caddy. "Do you think you've accomplished great things by coming? Judging by your manner of late, not to mention your looks, you haven't been drunk with happiness since you reached this town of historic importance and modern inconsequence. But of course—" she tilted the spout of the kettle into the teapot—"my suggestion that you stay where you belong was a mere woman's, and you saw fit to ignore it. Men like to bring blessings on their head—and my friend John Maxwell is most verily a man."

"You seem to forget it." He got up and began to walk backward and forward the length of the room. "I wonder if I am sometimes. When I see that round, red, moon-faced pig driving around town with Mary, taking long horseback rides with her, and going to see her whenever he pleases, I don't know how I keep from killing him. He isn't fit to be

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in the same town with her. I know the man, went to school with him. He's a cad and a coward and a big fat fool. He has some money—that is, his father has—and a smearing of education, but he's coarse and common and not to be trusted. Van Orm was a gentleman at least, and if Mary wanted—"

"Does Mary know as much of your friend Mr. Fielding as you do?" Miss Gibbie handed him a cup of tea, but he waved it back.

"If she doesn't it's because she's trying to be blind and deaf. I have seen practically nothing of her since I came down. You think I shouldn't have come. Perhaps I shouldn't, but I'm here, and for the present am going to stay. For six months I've held off, but through them we've been generally friendly, and I was hoping it might work, the thing you suggested. I stayed away as long as I could. But I had to come. I had to see for myself—see how she was, even if I came through hell."

"A trip through hell might help many men. The trouble is they might not be able to pass through. Ten days of it—"

"Is more than man is meant to stand. You are quite right." He stopped and looked down at her. "What is it? What is the matter with Mary? She is horribly polite, but were I a leper she could not hold herself more aloof. Morning, noon, and night she has engagements, and frequently with that brass-coated mine-owner of the Middle West. Do you

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think"—his face darkened, fear had unnerved him—"do you think she has any idea of marrying him?"

Miss Gibbie's head turned. The cup on its way to her lips was held back and her left eye closed.

"Marrying whom? That Fielding person?" The tea was blown into bubbles. "He uses a toothpick in public. Do you think Mary would marry a thing of that kind?"

He laughed begrudgingly. "I can't imagine it, but neither can I imagine why she is doing what she does—why she treats me as if I were the most incidental acquaintance."

Miss Gibbie put down her cup, and pushed her chair a little farther from the fire. "You don't have to, John. There are some things God doesn't expect of a man. One is to see through a woman. He knows the limitations of the male, and won't hold you responsible. Sit down!" She waved to the chair in front of her. "I can't talk to any one I can't see."

With a half-smile, half-frown John took his seat, and again shaded his eyes with his hand. "Being that dense creature, a man, I would appreciate the opinion of an illuminating lady on the tactics of her sex. What have I done to bring this nonsense to pass? I make no pretence of understanding any sort of woman, much less Mary's sort, but why this charming indifference at one time, this indignant curtness at another? I'm in the air, I admit, but I'm here to stay as long as that familiar-mannered

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individual stays. I'd like Mary to understand it, whether she wishes to or not. Would you mind making the intimation? She doesn't give me the chance."

Miss Gibbie tapped her lips with the tips of her fingers, blew through them for a few seconds, then she tilted the stool over and kicked it aside.

"For a person of ordinary sense you are extraordinarily dull at times." She looked at him long and searchingly, then she leaned forward. "Tell me," she said, "are you honestly in earnest when you say you don't know what is the matter with Mary?"

"With God as witness—"

"You're such a fool! Don't you see she's just found out—she loves you?"

Half a moment he stared as if not hearing. In the glow of firelight she saw his face whiten; then he got up and walked to the window behind her. For some time he stayed there, looking through it with eyes that saw not, and only the crackling logs broke the stillness of the room. Celia came in to turn on lights and take away the tea-tray, but Miss Gibbie waved her back. "I want the firelight," she said. "When I need you I'll ring."

A few minutes more she watched the dancing flames and, watching them, her face grew pale and strangely gentle. Into it came memories of the days that were for her no more. Presently, without turning, she called:

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"John!"

"Well."

"I have something to tell you."

Slowly he came toward her. In his face was the look she had seen in the long ago, and suddenly hers was buried in her hands.

He stood beside her. "For the love of God"—his voice was not yet steady—"don't tell me what you have just said—is not true."

With effort her hands were opened, and again she leaned back in her chair, but she did not look up. "I shall tell you nothing that is not true," she said, wearily. "Mary loves you, but she is as stubborn as you were blind. It has pleased you to put hope in Mrs. Deford's heart, pleased you to be attentive to her little make-believe of a daughter. Mary has seen and heard things that have led her to imagine you were in love with Lily."

John sat down suddenly, limp with incredulity. "In love with Lily—Lily Deford? Did she think I was a—"

"She did. She felt about you very much as really fine women would feel could they look down from the battlements of heaven and see the sort of things their husbands frequently bring home to take their place. You have been seen with Lily morning, noon, and night when she wasn't with that Pugh boy, who they say is in love with her, and—"

"I was with her as a bluff. Billy Pugh is a friend

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of mine, and a good, clean fellow. Having troubles of my own, I felt sorry for him, and was standing by; that was all. He's not responsible for his father's or grandfather's business. They were in it before he was born, and it's been honestly conducted always, which, unfortunately, is more than Lily's father's was. Lily's father was a rascal, if he is the husband of his wife. I'm not telling you what you don't know; only why I have no patience with this rotten pride of Mrs. Deford I've been Lily's dump. Into my ears she's poured oceans of lamentations, and I've let her babble on because it gave her such tearful satisfaction. I like Billy, and stand ready to help any time he can squeeze out courage to take things in his own hands."

"And you've been party to these secret meetings, have you? Been thinking so much of Lily's happiness you forgot other people's. You'd help them run away, I suppose?"

"I would. I believe in all respect being paid parents, believe their consent to marriage should always be asked, their approval desired. But if for any fool ancestral reasons consent and approval are denied, then were I one of the parties I should invite the parents to the wedding, but let them understand that whether they came or not the bells would ring. Were I Billy Pugh and loved his little Lily I'd marry her to-morrow. If he had a million Mrs. Deford would forget he didn't have recorded forefathers.

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The trouble with Billy is he's not yet rich. I told him a week ago I was ready to help."

His face suddenly changed and he leaned forward. "Do you mean that Mary has actually, seriously imagined I was interested in Lily Deford?" With a hard grip his hands interclasped as he looked in the dancing flames, and when he next spoke his voice was again unsteady. "It is not given to many men to love as I love Mary. I could speak of this to no one else, for words are not for love like mine. But having known her, having in my life but one thought, one hope— Why didn't you tell her? Why did you let her think I was such a fool?"

"Why?" Miss Gibbie sat upright. "I thought you were one myself. Your unremitting attendance upon Lily was carrying my suggestions rather far. In matters of compromise a man is a master. He'd fall in love with anything if there was nothing else to fall in love with. Mary has been something of a trial, and how did I know your vanity had not surrendered to the soothing balm of adoration? A bit of encouragement and Lily would have swung incense. She's that kind. Many a man marries a woman because of her admiration for him. Many a woman marries her husband because no other man asked her. Only occasionally do we find either man or woman who carries through life one image alone in the heart. When you came down here you went first to the Defords."

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"And why? You were with Mary, and for important matters of business discussion. I would have been in the way. I walked out to Tree Hill and back, had a fight with myself about coming in, but knew I shouldn't. I came down purposely on the twenty ninth, the anniversary of Mary's return to Yorkburg, but—"

"Have you told Mary this?"

"Told her? I've told her nothing. She gives me no chance."

"Gives? A man who doesn't *take* his chance doesn't deserve it! For the love of Heaven, stop being so considerate and remember a woman has to be mastered every now and then!"

She pulled up her silk skirt and held the tips of her velvet slippers to the fire.

"Put on a fresh log, will you? Not even backlogs have backbone any more. When I was young, men had red blood, and color and flavor went with love-making. Nowadays people are afraid of emotion, and courtship is a milk-and-mush affair. What time is it?"

John took out his watch. "Quarter to six."

"Time to go home, boy. You are going to the Porters' party, I suppose? I understand the little pot and big pot will be put on to-night. They'll live on herrings for breakfast and cheese for supper the rest of the winter, doubtless, but Josephine Porter is bound to blow out once a year. Those decorations

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of her grandfather, by royalty bestowed, must be kept in remembrance. With whom are you going?"

"I asked Mary, and am going with Lily." John smiled grimly. "I got an invitation for Billy and will hand her over as soon as her mother is out of the way. I can't understand why Billy doesn't assert himself."

"You can't? Queer!" Miss Gibbie looked in the fire. "Mary is going to the party with that Fielding person, I believe. To-morrow night she spends here. At supper I have some things to talk over with her; so you can't come to supper. You might come in about eight-thirty. I'm reading a French novel that Mary objects to. She read it, and told me I mustn't. Unless some one talks to her she'll talk to me. Would you mind dropping in so I can get at the book?"

She held out her hand. "Our bargain," he said, gravely. "I can no longer hold to it. Do you release me?"

"Release you?" She strangled the sudden sob in her throat. "Love has released you. Don't you see —Mary is awake?"

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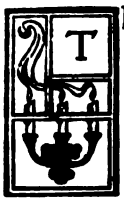
XXII

THE NEWS



HE basket in Mrs. McDougal's hands was dropped as if its every egg were a coal of living fire.

"Kingdom come and glory be! Kingdom come—and—glory be!" She clapped first her right hand on her left and then her left on her right, and stared into Mr. Blick's beaming black eyes as if through them rather than his mouth the information just received was to be confirmed. Then she sat down on a soap-box and rocked in unqualified delight.

"Kingdom come and glory be! What 'd you tell me a thing like that for when I was a-standin' up? I might have sat down in that bucket of lard 'stead of on a keg of herrings—or is it soap?" She looked down with sudden anxiety on the seat she had taken without thought. "I been long a-hopin' somethin' like this would happen, but I wasn't expectin' of it to come this way. Kingdom come and glory be!"

Again Mrs. McDougal rocked backward and forward, her arms this time tightly clasped as if hugging a cherished possession. Presently she threw back

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her head and laughed until the tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Can't help it, Mr. Blick—can't help it! To think of Pa Pugh and Ma Deford in the course of nature being grandparents of the same unsuspectin' infant! One and the same! I've never heard tell that the devil was much on laughin', but he's a good grinner, and he'll be just enjoyin' of himself to-day. That he will. And so will I. Bein' human, I chuckle when I gets a chance. Kingdom come and glory be!"

From a mysterious arrangement in the back of her skirt Mrs. McDougal pulled out a handkerchief, made from the remains of an old sheet, and wiped her eyes with it. Then she got up and leaned upon the counter behind which Mr. Blick stood waiting for a chance to speak; his round, red cheeks redder than usual, and his beady little eyes blinking with importance.

"Tell me about it," she said. "I must have been dead and buried not to have heard no speculations. Now I come to think of it, I did hear the children say they seen Mr. Billy Pugh and Miss Lily Deford sneakin' along in the shank of the evenin', all alone by themselves. But I ain't paid no attention to it. Mrs. Deford don't think people like the Pughs is fitten to spit on, but she owes Mr. Pugh this minute a bill, I bet you, for carriage rides, what's bigger than she will ever pay. Maybe now he won't press her for it, bein' they're so close connected from hence-

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forth and forever on." And once more Mrs. McDougal's hands came together with a resounding smack.

"But tell me about it." She leaned farther over the counter. "When did it happen, and where did they go, and how did the news come? Do pray shake your tongue, Mr. Blick, and say something. You're as bad as McDougal, and slower 'n molasses in winter runnin' down a hill. What did the old lady do?—Mrs. Deford, I mean. Is she come to yet? Now, if 'twas just death, I could go by and leave my sympathies. Even mill folks is counted then, for people like to say poor people come and shed tears. It sounds hopeful for heaven. But in marriage it's different. Congratulations is presumptuous, lessen they come from kinfolks and friends, I reckon, and Mrs. Deford wouldn't care to get the kind I'd like to give. Pride is a sure destroyer, and as for haughty spirits!—I ain't no student of history, but I've watched Yorkburg and I've seen right many different kinds of falls. I don't make no pretence of bein' a Miss Mary Cary kind of Christian. I'm just a church kind, who goes regular when I got the clothes, and talks mean about my fellow-members when they make me mad. 'Tain't no set of people which talks more about each other than church members. Seems like 'tis their chief delight. It's a heap easier and more soothin' to go to church and feel you kind of got a permit to say what you oughtn't than to try to live like Christ.

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But if you ain't a-goin' to tell me about the runaway I'll just leave my eggs and step over and see Miss Puss Jenkins. Miss Puss will talk to anybody, anywhere, day or night. All you got to do is to ask your first question and take your seat. If 'n you ain't got nothin' to say—"

"How can I say it if you don't let a word get in noway, nohow?" Mr. Blick was huffy. He had much to say, and thus far had been forced to dumbness. "Don't anybody know anything much. They was both at the party last night, and Mrs. Porter says that's what comes of givin' folks like the Pughs an inch. Mr. John Maxwell asked her for an invitation for Billy, and she gave it, being it was Mr. Maxwell who asked, and the result was he run off and married—"

"Miss Lily! That he did! Bein' plain, he took an ell. Bein' proud, she'll give him hell!—Mrs. Deford will. Just listen at that! I'm gettin' to be a regular rhymer. Swell people certainly do have advantage over humble ones. I tell you now, when I get to heaven I ain't a-goin' to be in no particular hurry to be a saint with a halo. I want first to be privileged to say unto others what they've said unto us. But I don't want to do that till I get through with Eve. She's the first person I'm goin' to make a bee-line to. If ever a woman did need shakin', it's Eve. As for Adam—" She waved her hand. "A man what hides behind a woman's petticoats, or whatever she's

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wearin' at the time, and says 'she made me do it,' I got my opinion of. Bein' a Bible character, I don't speak of him in public often, but I ain't never felt no call to be proud of him for a first father. It do look, though, as if all men since Adam has been makin' of women an excuse. She's always handy to blame things on. Reckon somebody will be sayin' next Miss Lily made Mr. Billy fall in love with her."

"They say Mrs. Deford is holding of Miss Mary Cary responsible for the running away." Mr. Blick began to weigh out certain orders which had been delayed by the coming of Mrs. McDougal. "Miss Puss Jenkins was in here this morning before breakfast and she says Mrs. Deford is as near crazy as a lady like her could be. It seems Mr. Maxwell took Miss Lily to the party last night, and, while her ma was there, too, she slipped home and changed her dress and got her valise. Billy Pugh did the same thing. Mr. Maxwell helped, though they say they didn't tell him anything about it until last night, and he had to wear his dress clothes. They caught the ten-ten train and went as far as Vinita, where the preacher was waiting, Billy having gotten the license from the county clerk during the day. Mr. Maxwell went with them and saw them married and caught the twelve-twenty train back, bringing with him a note for Mrs. Deford."

"I reckon she's been swoonin' ever since, ain't she?" Mrs. McDougal took up a handful of dried

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peaches and ran them through her fingers. "She don't look like a swooner. She'd do better at swearin', I reckon, and yet faintin' is always considered a high-class sign."

"Fainting!" Mr. Blick patted the butter in the scale and took a pinch off. "Miss Puss Jenkins says she walked the floor the rest of the night, and is walking yet. What she hasn't said about Mr. John Maxwell ain't in human speech, but this morning she began on Miss Mary Cary and is holding of her responsible just now. The hotter she got with Mr. Maxwell, the cooler he got, Miss Puss says. She was with her when he came back with the note, and if he was the kind that got scared he'd be shaking yet. But he ain't that kind. He told her they'd made up their minds to get married and when she calmed down she'd be much obliged to him for going with them and seeing it was well done. She was too raging for him to say much, and he didn't stay long, so I was told."

Mrs. McDougal wiped her mouth. "Well, sir, I felt somethin' in the air when I waked up this mornin', and I could tell by my bones Yorkburg was shook by somethin'. It don't take much to make Yorkburg shake, and it ain't had nothin' to talk about lately. This will give it somethin'. Miss Lily Deford and Mr. Billy Pugh married! Whom the Lord loveth He chaseth! He sure must be fond of Mrs. Deford! Well, all I've got to say is I hope they'll

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stay away until the thunder and lightning is over. A caterpillar has about as much chance to stand up straight as Miss Lily to meet her ma in argument. I tell you now I wouldn't like that longnet thing she puts to her eye to stare at me if I was alone with her." She took up her basket. "Is the eggs out? I don't know what I come for. My breath and brains is clean gone this mornin'. I wonder if Miss Puss Jenkins is home? I think I'll just step up the street and ask her if she's got any more of them missionary aprons to sell." She winked at Mr. Blick. "Ain't folks funny? And don't we have to make believe a lot in life? Miss Puss has told so many people she makes aprons for her missionary money that she believes it sure enough. I make out I believe it, too. It helps her feelin's and pays your bills. She says she has so much time and so little to do that she feels she ought to give some of it to the Lord, so she makes aprons. Well, good-bye, Mr. Blick. Much obliged to you for telling what you know, but my grandmother always told me to go to females when wantin' details. A man ain't much on trimmin's. Good-bye!" And with a wave of her hand she was gone.

An hour later John Maxwell, walking up and down in Mrs. Deford's parlor, stood for a moment in front of the mirror between the windows and smiled grimly at the face reflected in it. "Moral!" he said. "When doing unto others as you'd have them do to

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you, be sure there's no mother-in-law in it. I'm as innocent as a lamb, and, like the lamb, am getting it in the neck, all right. I thought to do a kindness, and am called a criminal. Poor creature! She was as crazy last night as any March hare that ever hopped. When she was through with me I was, let me see"—he counted on his fingers—"I was an instigator, an abetter, a thief, a rascal, a double-dealer and hypocrite, a deceiver and destroyer, a traitor and a flirt, a socialist and anarchist. I was everything but a man."

He whistled softly and looked toward the door. "I'd give fifteen cents if I could smoke during the coming interview. It's a gentleman's only way of relieving his feelings when a lady is taking his head off. I held in last night after stating facts, and stood the storm, but I don't promise to do it again. I'm tired of this nonsense. If there are high horses this morning, the tragedy queen must mount and rant alone."

A noise as of deep breathing made him turn. In the doorway Mrs. Deford stood tense, rigid, erect. A trailing black wrapper replaced the low-cut shabby satin gown of the evening before. The pallor of her face was heightened by a liberal use of powder which ended under her eyes, where pencil-marks had been added to their usual lines to give emphasis to the shock. And as she slowly advanced she measured each step as though unequal to another.

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With an inclination of the head John waited until she had taken her seat. Her tactics had changed. So had his. For a brief moment he stood in front of her, then spoke, and his voice and manner made her look up as she had not intended to look.

"You have sent for me," he said. "I will be obliged if you will say quickly what you have to say." He took out his watch. "I have an engagement in less than fifteen minutes—"

"You have!" She half rose. His words were as match to tinder. "I have an engagement for the rest of my life with shame and disgrace and disappointment. You have helped to bring them on me. and you tell me to hurry — to *hurry!*" Her right hand flew out with tragic eloquence. "That I receive you in my house is beyond my understanding."

"And mine, madam. Shall I leave?" He smiled and started toward the door.

"You shall not!" With frantic energy her arm was waved. "Have you no heart in your bosom that you can so treat the agony in my breast! My child who has in her veins the best blood in the State married to a—to a—what?"

A clean, honest man, who loves her. Your daughter is very fortunate, Mrs. Deford."

"Fortunate!" Her voice was a half-shriek. "She is disgraced and so am I. Who are his people?" She shuddered. "From what does he come?"

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"As the ceremony is over, the important question just now is where is he going? His salary in the bank here is exactly eighty-three dollars thirty-three and one-third cents per month. A bank in which I am a director in New York is looking for a certain kind of young man. I wired to-day to hold the place for Billy. I think it can be managed. The salary is three thousand a year. There is nothing to bring Lily back to Yorkburg. I understood last night you would never recognize her husband. Pity! New York is rather a nice place to visit. Mother can find them a suitable apartment, and Billy is not apt to worry you about coming on. I wrote mother last night to make it pleasant for them and turn over my man and the machine until I get back." He again took out his watch. "Is there anything else? My time is up."

"Mine isn't, and you are not to go!" Her arm waved up and down. "Do you think *lending* your automobile a few days will make up for our walking the rest of our lives? Do you think I expected Lily and myself to *walk* through life? I tell you *no!* I expected to ride! And what is three thousand a year when there might have been thirty! But the suffering of a mother's heart is not to be understood by a selfish man. You have been a traitor! In the darkness of the night you helped my daughter marry a man whose father has hitched up horses for me to ride behind. A man by the name of P-u-g-h!" She

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blew out the word by letters, her lips trembling on each. Again she repeated it—"P-u-g-h!"

He looked at the writhing, twisting woman steadily, and out of his eyes went all pity and patience. "The name of Pugh is a very honest one," he said. presently. "And a man who takes good care of horses is worthier than he who takes no care of his family. If there is nothing else, I must bid you good-morning."

"There is something else." She rose from the sofa on which she had been sitting and, baffled, threw prudence to the wind. She could bring from him neither regret nor sympathy, neither explanation nor apology. Frankly the night before he had told his part. Clearly this morning he had not changed his mind. No. She was not through.

"And why, may I ask, was this interest in my daughter's affairs taken so suddenly? I understand you alone were not interested, but by another beguiled into this traitorous help. To get Lily out of the way fits well into the scheming plans of your helper. As a woman, I have been ashamed to see how you have been pursued by one who had no mother to direct her. She has thrown herself at your head, at your feet, has given you no chance to escape, and now I suppose is triumphant—"

John turned. "Of whom are you speaking?"

"Of whom? You know very well of whom. Since childhood Mary Cary has—"

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"Don't you dare!" His hand went out as if to hold back further words. "Don't you dare call her name in this room." He went over to a window and opened it, letting the cold air in with a rush. "Miss Cary is the one woman in the world I want for my wife. She is the only woman I've ever given a thought to, and if she does not marry me I do not marry. A dozen times I have asked her. A dozen times she has refused. She does not enter into this discussion. Whatever else you forget, you are to remember that. Am I understood in regard to Miss Cary?"

Mrs. Deford's shoulders shrugged, then her eyes grew glassy. Suddenly she fell back upon the sofa as if faint, then suddenly again her mind was changed and her finger pointed toward the door.

"Go!" she said. "I consider you have insulted me. Go!"

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XXIII

THE GUILD AGAIN

THE Needlework Guild was again meeting with Mrs. Tate. Since its adjournment in May no meetings had been called by Mrs. Pryor, its president, and October had passed with nothing done.

Six months of retirement from her usual round of activities had seemed to Mrs. Pryor the proper allotment of time for a widow to absent herself from all places of a semi-public nature; and in adherence to her views she was waiting for six months to pass. Rumors of restlessness reaching her, however, she had called a meeting for November, which meeting, held on the morning following the Porters' party, had an attendance that would have been gratifying had its cause not been well understood.

Every chair was taken when Miss Honoria Brockenborough, who rarely honored the guild by her presence, came in, and Mrs. Tate, jumping up, offered her seat, then stepped into the hall and called the maid.

"Run over to Mrs. Corbin's and get me three or

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four of her dining-room chairs," she said, in a half-whisper, easily heard through the open door. "Both of those you brought out of my room are broken, and you'll have to take them out as soon as you come back. Tell her girl to help you, and do, pray, hurry! Don't stand looking at me like that, with your lip hanging down like a split gizzard. Go on! Bring six, and for goodness' sake don't stop and talk! Soon as you come in put some more coal on the fire. Mittie Muncaster looks blue already."

Incessant chatter had preceded the calling of the meeting to order, and only by restraint were the opening exercises endured, reports heard, and suggestions for the winter's work discussed. These over, with a sigh of expectancy or anxiety, according to temperament, the ladies settled down to their sewing, and chairs were drawn closer to the fire.

"I certainly am glad it isn't raining or hailing or snowing this morning," began Mrs. Tate, shaking out the gown of unbleached cotton on which she had been supposedly sewing during the past season. "What is the matter with this thing, anyhow? I believe I've gone and put a sleeve in the neck. Everybody knows I never could sew. Mr. Tate knew it when I married him, for I told him I'd rather handle a pitchfork than a needle. I might hold a pitchfork, but a needle I can't. What 'd I tell you! Mine's gone already!"

Triumphantly she looked at Mrs. Webb, who had taken the twisted garment from her hands and was

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ripping the sleeve from the neck. According to Mrs. Webb's ideas, it had been basted in. According to Mrs. Tate's, it had been sewed, but as there was no argument, and the needle was indeed gone, Mrs. Tate got up and went over to the fire. Punching it, she made the coals crackle and blaze cheerily, and, pulling up her skirt, she leaned against the mantel and looked happily around the well-filled room.

"You certainly ought to feel complimented, Mrs. Pryor," she said, nodding toward that lady's back. "I don't believe we've had a meeting like this since you've been president. I thought everybody would be so tired after the party we wouldn't have anybody at all, but everything in Yorkburg is wide-awake this morning. There'll be a lot of visits paid to-day. I wonder if Miss Gibbie Gault will be here?"

"Of course she won't! Miss Gibbie never comes unless she has something to say." Mrs. Pryor's long black veil was thrown back over her bonnet, and, standing by the table on which were yards of cottons to be cut into gowns, she took up her scissors and ran her fingers carefully down their edge. "I understand Laura Deford has sent for Miss Gibbie. She has something to say to her this morning."

"Then she'll have to go to her and say it." Mrs. Webb looked up, and for a moment her fingers stopped their rapid sewing. "You don't suppose Miss Gibbie is going to Mrs. Deford's just because Mrs. Deford sent for her, do you? If Laura knows

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what's good for her, and what she's doing, she will let Miss Gibbie alone."

"But that's what she don't know." Miss Lizzie Bettie Pryor's voice was as blunt as usual. "If ever there was a wild woman it's Laura Deford this minute. I've been with her all the morning, and she don't know salt from seaweed. She sent for John Maxwell and says he told her not to dare call Mary Cary's name in his presence, and that he never expects to marry any woman on earth."

"I don't believe it!" Mrs. Moon sat upright. "Mrs. Deford must be insane."

"She is." Miss Lizzie Bettie bit off a strand of cotton. "She'll cool down after a while, but just at present she don't know what she's talking about. If ever a woman wanted a man for a son-in-law she wanted John Maxwell. The flesh-pots of his Egypt are after her heart. I feel sorry for her, but she had no business behaving as she's done for months past."

"I don't wonder John helped the runaways." Mrs. Corbin threaded her needle at arm's-length. "Safety lay in flight of some sort, and as he will never fly as long as Mary Cary is here, the sensible thing was to help shoo Lily off. Mrs. Deford will have to let him alone now. Poor thing! It does seem strange how the cup that's bitterest is the one we always have to drink. I don't suppose any of us would scramble or push to get in the Pugh family, but Mr. Corbin says young Pugh is one of the finest

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young men in town, and he thinks Lily is lucky to get him. Of course, Mr. Corbin's opinion is just a man's, but Lily's best friend couldn't think she had any more sense than she needed, and she's the kind that fades before thirty. She's got a pretty complexion and lovely hair, but her nose— A girl with a nose like Lily's ought to be thankful to marry anybody, Mr. Corbin says."

"That's what I say!" Mrs. Tate's right foot was held out to the blazing coals, and her hands held tightly the rumpled skirt. "I tell you we have to follow the fashion, and it's the fashion now to forget what we used to remember. The Pughs certainly are plain, and that oldest girl, the fat, married one, must be hard to swallow, but they say that young one, Kitty I believe is her name, is going to marry Jim McFarlane. The McFarlanes are as good as the Defords any day, if Jim is as lazy and good-for-nothing as he's good-looking. Jim is my cousin, and I ought to know."

"So you will be connected with the Pughs also?" Mrs. Pryor turned, scissors in hand, and looked significantly at Mrs. Tate. "The Pughs will believe themselves in society after a while; will try, no doubt, to find a family tree."

"It could be a horse-chestnut." Mrs. Tate nodded at Mrs. Pryor. "I don't mind their being connected with me. I always did say a person wasn't responsible for their kin, and pride and shame in

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them don't speak much for yourself. I'm glad Aylette didn't marry Billy Pugh, but if she had I wouldn't be ranting around like Laura Deford is doing this minute. I guess I'd have given her a piece of my mind, and gone out and gotten her some wedding clothes. A girl certainly ought to have pretty things when she gets married, even if you don't think much of her taste in men. When Aylette was married I ran more ribbon in her clothes—pink and blue and lavender. I told her she might be a widow, and it was well to be ready. She didn't want lavender, but I love it, and I would put some in. I don't suppose a girl ever does marry just the kind of man her mother would like her to. I wouldn't want Aylette to know it, but I never have understood what she saw in Mr. Penhurst to fall in love with. He's from Worcester, Massachusetts." Mrs. Tate's hand went up and her eyes rolled ceilingward. "What he thinks of this part of the world wouldn't do to be written out!"

"And what we think of his wouldn't, either!" Miss Lizzie Bettie Pryor's head nodded so emphatically at Mrs. Tate that the latter sat down. "All I ask of people from his section of the world is to stay away from ours. I wish I could make a law forbidding people north of Mason and Dixon's line to come to Yorkburg. We don't want to know anything about them—what they think or what they say or what they do. If I could I'd put a glass top on

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Yorkburg and keep it always as the one spot in Virginia that remembers the past and is true to it."

"I'm mighty glad you can't make laws or put on glass tops." Mrs. Moon smiled good-naturedly. "If it wasn't for the people north of Mason and Dixon's line the woolen-mills would have to close and there'd be no butter for my bread. A good many other things would be affected also, and Yorkburg would waste away were it not for your unloved friends beyond the line. Certainly the inn would have to close, and the Colonial Arms and—"

"Better waste away and die than decay in ideals and traditions and heritage!" Miss Lizzie Bettie looked around the room. "Here we are educating everything in Yorkburg. Next year two new handsome schools will be opened and filled with the riff-raff of the town. What are we going to do with them after they're educated? Our streets have been torn up for months—"

"But they'll be lovely when finished." Mrs. Corbin laid down her work. "You know yourself, Lizzie Bettie, how Mary Cary fought for brick pavements instead of asphalt, because she said they suited Yorkburg better. And you know how she's worked to save all the old things and have the new ones to suit. In a few years this will be the prettiest town in the country. That Mr. Black who bought those ugly old shacks and stores, and pulled them down, making pretty open spaces of their lots, certainly has

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been a good friend to Yorkburg. I don't care what line he came over. I'm glad he came, and if he would only stay here long enough Mr. Corbin and I surely would ask him to tea."

"Who is this Mr. Black?" Mrs. Pryor looked in first one direction and then another." I would like to know something of this mysterious individual who comes here, buys property, pulls down our oldest houses—"

"Oldest eyesores." Mrs. Webb borrowed Mrs. Moon's scissors. "He certainly has put up some pretty old-fashioned-looking houses in their place. I was crazy for one, but Mr. Webb was so slow they were all taken before he spoke." She sighed. "A woman might as well try to move a mountain as to hurry a man when he don't want to do a thing. I've spoken for the next one, if there are any next."

"Who is this Mr. Black?" Again Mrs. Pryor asked the question.

"Nobody knows who he is, but I believe he is John Maxwell."

Miss Puss Jenkins, who had come in late, spoke from her seat near the door, and instinctively all turned toward her.

"John Maxwell!" Half a dozen voices repeated the name, but Miss Lizzie Bettie Pryor was the first to protest.

"Nonsense!" she said. "How can one man be another? I've seen Mr. Black several times. He's

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a sharp, shrewd, business-looking man who seems to know Mary Cary very well. Whenever he is in town he spends a good deal of time with her, I hear. He may be acting for somebody else, but it is not John Maxwell. The latter is not the kind of man to let anybody else attend to his business."

"Well, anyhow, I heard somebody say it was John Maxwell who bought those bonds and didn't want anybody to know it." Miss Puss was not to be crushed by Lizzie Bettie Pryor. "Of course, it's all guesswork, but a lot of money has been spent in this place in the last year. Not only on streets and schools and cleaning up and prizes for the prettiest back-yards and trees and things for Milltown, but on people. A dozen people that I know of were sent off on trips during the summer. People who couldn't afford to go. And it was always the same thing Mary Cary would tell. She'd just laugh and say Yorkburg's friend had asked her to do it. Yorkburg's friend never sent me anywhere. Everybody knows John Maxwell is Mary Cary's friend."

"So is Miss Gibbie Gault." Mrs. Tate, who was making tatting on her fingers with Mrs. Burnham's cotton, looked up. "Miss Gibbie is certainly her friend, but I don't suppose anybody would waste time thinking she was doing all these things."

"I imagine not!" Mrs. Pryor's voice was decisive. Then her face changed, and with an expression suit-

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able to recent affliction she folded her hands and shook her head.

"It is, indeed, distressing," she began, "to see a young girl so defy public opinion as Mary Cary does. For over a year she has been back in Yorkburg, and save for the weeks she was away on a summer holiday there has been no one of them in which she has not been discussed whenever two or three have met together."

"She certainly has!" Mrs. Tate's assent was eager, if undesired. "Her coming back has been like the raising of the dead. If there ever was a dull place, it was this one before she came. Somehow since she got here things look like they've taken a tonic, and so do we. Mary always did have a way of making you sit up and take notice and enjoying yourself."

Mrs. Pryor touched the bell. "As I was saying, Mary Cary is one of the people—I say it in all charitableness—who will always be talked about, just as—just as—"

"The sun would be talked about if it came out at night." Mrs. Tate felt no grudge and helped out willingly.

"Just as anybody would be talked about who is so very—very alive. I am sure she means well, but it is the Christian duty of some one to point out to her the mistakes she is making. She is spending money freely. Where does it come from?" Mrs. Pryor for-

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got her weeds, and her voice was the voice of the May meeting. "Where does that mysterious money come from? Everybody knows Gibbie Gault has money, but has anybody ever known her to give a dollar of it away? Go to her when you will and ask her to subscribe to this or contribute to that and she waves you out. Who has ever seen her name on any list of givers to anything. The money her father left her has increased enormously in value I've been told. She's a good business woman. Nobody denies that, but what will she present to her Maker when she stands before Him at the bar of judgment. And what are the words which she will hear?"

"Couldn't any of us guess that." Miss Mittie Muncaster went up to the grate and put on a large lump of coal. "I reckon a good many people would like to know what other people are going to have said to them at the bar of judgment. The thought of hell is a great comfort to some people. I certainly am glad the Lord's got to judge me, and not women. But, speaking of Mary Cary, I hear she's awfully worried about Lily's running away. She thinks it was so disrespectful to her mother not to tell her first and run afterward, if her mother still held out. Mary don't know Mrs. Deford. Lily wanted to take her head with her when she ran. There are mothers and mothers, and Mrs. Deford isn't the kind Mary keeps in her heart. I bet she gives it to John when she sees him."

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"Since this Mr. Fielding has been here, no one sees John with Mary any more." Mrs. Corbin put her needle between her lips. "Who is this Mr. Fielding? I don't like his looks a bit. He's never been here before."

Miss Honoria Brockenborough got up to go. Her lorgnette, the only one in town except Mrs. Deford's, was held to her eyes, and for a moment she looked at Mrs. Corbin.

"His presence here is a disgrace to Yorkburg." Her tone was icy. "I have heard very strange things of late. It is his money, I understand, which Mary Cary has been spending. He has as much as admitted it himself."

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XXIV

THE PIECE OF PAPER

STANDING in front of the library fire, Miss Gibbie held her hands out to its blaze. "This room isn't warm enough. Jackson isn't half attending to the furnace. I wish you'd ring for him to put on more coal. Jackson is losing his mind of late. If he wasn't a church member I'd think he was seeking, he's been so doleful the last few days. They are half-cracked, every one of them, when their meetings begin."

"Jackson has undigested dyspepsia. He told me so himself just before supper." Mary Cary opened the coal-bin, and with the tongs lifted a large lump of coal and put it in the grate. "It must be a dreadful thing to have, judging by his expression." She laughed and wiped her hands on her handkerchief. "I suggested peppermint and hot water, but he looked so reproachfully at me that I changed it to Compound Elixir of Hexagonal Serafoam. He's anxious to try that."

"What is it?"

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"I don't know." She shook her head. "But the sound pleased him, so I'm going to give him some calomel to-morrow under the new name. It's nonsense to say there's nothing in a name. There's money in it, cure in it, and comfort of mind. Why don't you sit down?"

Miss Gibbie walked over to the library-table, took up a magazine, opened it, put it down and took up another. Mary, following her with her eyes, seeing the restlessness which possessed her and the restraint she was obviously trying to exercise, was puzzled, and again she asked: "Why don't you sit down?"

"I think it's because I prefer to stand. But it may be because I've been sitting for hours hearing people tell the same thing over in a different way. Just sixteen people have been here to-day and every single one of them told me every single thing about the party; how pretty Polly Porter looked, and what a sight Georganna Brickhouse made of herself in a light-blue dress, suitable for sixteen, and how good the supper was, all except the salad. That was a new-fashioned mess Mrs. Deford made after a recipe brought from Maine. Mittie Muncaster's nose is still up. Things have come to a pretty pass when Maine recipes are used in Virginia, Mittie says. You'd think Yorkburg had been insulted. And every single one of the sixteen said their say over the runaway. Mourned, groaned, or were glad, according to their feelings. Some weren't at all sur-

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prised. Been expecting it. That was Lizzie Bettie Pryor and Puss Jenkins. Some people always know a thing is going to happen after it happens. And some won't believe it though in front of their face. You, too, have been airing your views on runaway marriages ever since you came in. For a person who doesn't intend to get married you have very decided views concerning matrimony."

"That's why I never expect to get married. If I didn't have views, I might. I've never said I didn't approve of people marrying. I do. Though why they want to, I don't see. Life has enough disappointments without finding that marriage is another. It certainly can't be a cheerful realization, that of discovering your husband is a very different man from what you thought him."

"Nor a very cheerful discovery for a man when he realizes the woman he loves is really a child! My dear Mary Cary, don't imagine the discoveries of character and temperament, of idiosyncrasies and peculiarities, are all on the woman's side. A man has to stand much. There are times when a woman may be an angel, but others when she behaves as if her ancestry was in a different direction. No wizard works such enigmatical changes as that master of human destinies called Love. Lives are glorified or ruined by it, and no man or woman experiences it who is not more or less, in the process of experiencing, some sort of a fool. They play with happiness as

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though it were a toy, and learn too late they've thrown away the only thing worth having in life. By-the-way, speaking of happiness, has this Mr. Horatio Fielding gone yet?"

Mary Cary drew the big wing chair closer to the fire and sat upon its arm, one slippered foot on the fender. "No. He has not gone yet. He goes to-morrow, I believe."

"He does!" Miss Gibbie looked at the face opposite, and over her own again swept indecision. During supper she had been too incensed to trust herself to tell what that afternoon had reached her ears, and yet it must be told. Were it possible to spare her she would spare. It was not possible. Kind friends were too ready to spread cruel things. It was best she should hear from her what must be heard.

"This Mr. Fielding," she began, taking a seat on the far end of the big old-fashioned sofa, well out of the firelight. "Is he a man of honor? Can you depend upon statements he makes?"

"A man of honor?" Miss Gibbie was looked at questioningly. "I don't know what you mean. He's abominably blatant and nouveau, and a terrible trial to talk to. But dishonorable— There's been no occasion for him to act dishonorably. His statements are mostly about his father's wealth and the kind of machine he likes best and his tailor in Piccadilly and cafés in Paris. I don't know how correct they are. I didn't half hear them. I could think of other things

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when he was talking, and generally brought them in for that purpose."

"And yet for some days past you have been constantly with this abominably blatant and terribly trying person. You have driven home with him at eight o'clock at night."

"I have. Why shouldn't I? I wouldn't have driven with him at four if I shouldn't have driven with him at eight. I did that the night I was caught by the storm at Miss Matoaca Brockenborough's. She was sick, and Mr. Fielding talked with Miss Honoria in the parlor while I was up-stairs with Miss Matoaca. I would have come here, but I had some important letters to write that night and didn't let Mr. Fielding come in. He drove back and left the horse at Mr. Pugh's stable."

"Had he been drinking?"

Mary Cary got up from the arm of the chair, her face incredulous. "Drinking? No, he hadn't been drinking. That is, I don't suppose he had. How could I tell? He talked a lot and laughed at the way Miss Honoria introduced him to all the family portraits, and the superior air in which she told him the history of each. I remember he called her Miss Icicle."

"How did he happen to go there with you?"

"We'd been to drive. He'd never seen the bluff and was interested in the battle fought there. I made him leave me at Miss Matoaca's, but he in-

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sisted on coming back to go out home with me. I was too tired to argue." She brushed her hair back as if tired again. "The rain kept us, and it was eight before we got off."

"I have been told Miss Honoria was not the only one who gave information that afternoon. When was it? Day before yesterday, I believe. He made statements which Miss Honoria seemed to find more startling, if not so amusing, as those he made to her."

"Did he?" Mary straightened one of the tall white candles in the candelabrum of many prisms on the end of the mantelpiece near which she stood. Her voice was not interested. "I believe he did tell me Miss Honoria was a cut-glass catechiser and very much interested in me."

"He did not tell you his answers to your questions, I suppose?"

"He certainly didn't. I cared for neither questions nor answers." She turned and looked at Miss Gibbie and laughed indifferently. "Mr. Fielding seems to have become suddenly important. You sound like a cross-examining lawyer. He goes tomorrow, and I never expect to see him again. Why this interest?"

Miss Gibbie looked down at the tip of her slipper. Stooping, she straightened its bow. "Because of some very silly things I heard this afternoon." She put the other foot on the rung of the chair in front of her and carefully smoothed its ribbon with fingers

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that twitched. "Honoria Brockenborough claims he told her the money you have been spending in Yorkburg came from him, that the bonds were bought by his broker, and that he was Yorkburg's friend."

Indifference slipped off as a garment, and, at Miss Gibbie's words, Mary Cary stiffened in rigid horror and unbelief. For a moment she stared at her as if not understanding, and her hand went to her throat. She choked in her effort to speak, and her eyes flashed fire.

"I don't believe it! The moment between her hearing and speaking was tense. "He said—" her breath came unevenly—"he said *he* was Yorkburg's friend? *He* had given the money I had spent! He—And I—alone in the world!"

She threw out her hands as though to ward off some dreadful thing, then dropped in the big wing chair and buried her face in her arms.

"Mary! Mary!" Miss Gibbie, terrified by the unexpected effect of her words, leaned over the twisting figure and put her hand upon it. The hand was shaken off. For the first time in her life Miss Gibbie Gault was helpless and afraid.

"Mary!"

"Don't! Don't touch me! Don't speak to me!" She got up and threw back her head, then looked at the clock. "What time is it?" She walked over to the bell and pressed it. "You've often said deep down in every woman was something dangerous. All

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of us have something we'd die for quickly. And I—all I have—is just myself."

"What are you going to do?" Miss Gibbie sat down limply in the chair from which Mary had just risen. "Why did you ring? You aren't going to take seriously the thing I have told you? The man is being looked after. John is attending to him tonight."

"John!"

The word came involuntarily, and her head was turned quickly lest its spasm of pain be seen. "What has John to do with it?"

"A very good deal." Miss Gibbie's breath was coming back. The shock and fury in Mary's face had frightened her as not in years had she been frightened. "John has heard these rumors and will settle their source. What do you want, Celia?"

"You rang, did you not?" Celia, hands on the curtains, waited.

"I rang. I want my coat and hat." Mary Cary turned to her. "I want you, too, for a little while, Celia. Get ready, please, to go out with me." She went over to the desk and took from one of its many pigeon-holes paper and pencil. "I am going to Miss Honoria Brockenborough's."

"What are you going there for?" Miss Gibbie's voice made pretence of petulance. "What do you want to see her for?"

"Didn't you tell me when people said things about

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you that were not true you made them sign a paper to that effect? Were Miss Honoria Brockenborough dying she'd have to sign that paper to-night. She has lied, or the man of whom she spoke has lied, and either the one or the other or both shall say so. Don't you see"—for the first time her voice broke, and again she put her hand to her throat—"don't you see she is taking from me all—everything I have. When I was here, a child, a bit of sea-weed, I knew my life depended—on just myself. All the eyes of all the world did not matter so much as my own. You do not know what it means to be alone in life!"

She stopped as if something had suddenly given way, and on her knees her face was hidden in Miss Gibbie's lap.

Only the crackling of the coal in the grate broke the stillness of the room. Presently Miss Gibbie spoke, lifted the white, drawn face to hers.

"I do not know what it means to be alone in life? It is about all of life I do know!" Out of her voice she struggled to keep bitterness, made effort to laugh. "And do you suppose I would let Honoria Brockenborough scatter her righteous assertions a minute longer than they were heard? Puss Jenkins left me at four o'clock. An hour later I was back home." She opened her beaded bag. "There is your piece of paper!" She shook it in the air. "Honoria Brockenborough is now in bed with an attack of nervous collapse. I hope it will keep her there some

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time. Matoaca hasn't stopped crying since the guild meeting this morning, and for the first time in her life has bitterly reproached her Sister Superior who felt it her Christian duty to repeat what she now says she understood a hope-inflated, love-mad, half-tight fool had said. Queer old place, Mary, this big world! Queer little place this old Yorkburg! Not one person in forty thousand can repeat a statement correctly, and, when pinned down, what was said and what repeated can be very differently constructed. I thought it was as well Honoria Brockenborough should have a few remarks made to her. She's had them. The doctor is, doubtless, with her now. Do you want this paper?"

Mary Cary took the paper held toward her. As she read it the color came back slowly in her face, and the short, shivering breath grew quiet again.

"Yes," she said, "I want it." With a sob she leaned toward the older woman. "I told you I was all—alone. And already you—Miss Gibbie! Miss Gibbie!"

In each other's arms they clung as mother and child.

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XXV

THE CONCLUSION OF A MATTER

"YOU say, then, you did not make the statements the lady credits you with? You will take oath to that?"

"Of course I will." Horatio Fielding's shifty brown eyes looked for a moment into John Maxwell's relentless gray ones, then dropped uneasily. "What in the devil is all this about, anyhow? You come in on a fellow with some damned gossip a lot of old cats have been telling in their sewing society and accuse him of it before he knows what you're talking about. I don't even know what you're getting at."

"I am getting at the truth or falsehood of certain statements attributed to you. Cut that out—I prefer to talk to you sober." He waved his hand toward the table on which were bottles of brandy and White Rock. "You know what these statements are. To repeat them is unnecessary. The lady who claims she understood you to make them has repeated them to, among others, a Mr. Benjamin Brickhouse. Mr. Brickhouse claims he approached you on the subject

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and you neither affirmed nor denied them. You are to do one or the other, and do it now."

Horatio Fielding's face flushed. "I am—am I? Who says so?"

"I say so."

John Maxwell came closer. He looked down on the short, full figure with the round, red face, and the round, red face grew redder. The restraint of the larger man, his height and breadth and radiation of power and purpose stung him, and for a moment he yielded to bravado. A look in the face above his checked him, however, and he changed his manner.

"Oh, I'm perfectly willing to deny what I didn't do!" He shrugged his shoulders. "To hear you one would think I wasn't a gentleman. Of course I didn't say I'd furnished Mary Cary with money—"

"We are speaking of Miss Cary."

He bowed smilingly. "Miss Cary with money to spend on people here, or had bought bonds, or was Yorkburg's unknown friend. I said I'd be glad to do it, as I was a friend of Yorkburg's and would like to be a better one."

"Sit down at that table."

"What for?" Horatio Fielding's shoulders went back and the dots in his tan-colored vest showed plainly. "I prefer to stand."

"I prefer you to sit. There's paper and pen and ink at that table. Three letters at my dictation, and if you hurry you can catch that ten-ten train."

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"I'll be damned if I do!"

"You'll be damned if you don't. To make you understand what you have done is impossible. To make you make what amends you can, isn't. Sit down and write."

Three letters, one to Mr. Benjamin Brickhouse, one to Miss Honoria Brockenborough, one to Miss Gibbie Gault, were written sulkily and in words supplied by John Maxwell. Signed and in their envelopes, John put them in his pocket, then again looked at his watch. "You have plenty of time," he said, "and if you know what's good for you you'll get out from here and be quick at it."

"Get out nothing!" With a swift movement of his hand Horatio Fielding poured out a full measure of brandy and drank it. "I'd like to know what you've got to do with this thing, anyhow! That's the worst of a little hell of a town like this. Nothing in it but a lot of relics and old-maid men and pussy-cat women spying on a girl because she's young and pretty. That cut-glass icicle with an antique nose asked me so many questions that I thought I'd let her know all the goods wasn't in this part of the world. She walked me around the room three times showing me a bunch of old duffers in wigs and knee-breeches, and half-dressed women with caps or curls. Said she didn't suppose we had family portraits in Nevada. I told her what we did have. If she chose to say I said what she says, she did it because she hates people

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with money worse than snake poison. All her class is muggy on money. Thinks it common to have it. But they've got a long reach all right, and can be very smirky to the face when they smell the stuff. As for questions—" John being near the window, he took hastily another drink of brandy. "She asked enough to make a catechism. I didn't mind her quizzers. She's on the sour, and I thought I'd help her enjoy herself. I told her I didn't mind Mary Cary's having been an orphan. I was willing to marry her, parents or no parents."

"*Willing!*" John turned. His right arm went out, and from Horatio Fielding's nose blood spurted over the spotted vest, down the legs of his well-creased trousers, and settled on his patent-leather shoes. Howling, he sprang toward the larger man. With his foot John kicked him in the air, and as he came down on the floor stood over him as he would a puppy.

"I can't fight you. I'm too much bigger," he said, spitting toward the fireplace. "To shake a rat would be as easy. But I don't promise to keep my hands off much longer. You're a liar! If you didn't say all Miss Brockenborough says you said, you implied it. At college you cheated, and you'd smirch a good name in a minute if your own interests could be helped. I'd rather not have blood on my hands, and I haven't time for a trial, but if you don't get out of this town to-night you'll be shipped out in a

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box to-morrow. You've got an hour. Are you going?"

Horatio Fielding got up, his handkerchief to the bleeding nose. "If it takes the last cent I've got on earth I'll make you pay for this," he said, thickly. He pulled out another handkerchief and put it to his cut lip. "I believe you've broken my nose."

"I hope I have. You're lucky it's not your neck." John took a card out of his pocket-book and handed it to the shaking figure. "That's my address in New York. If you want to see me again you can find me without trouble. Next time I'll kill you."

But Horatio Fielding was out of the room. An hour later at the station John Maxwell saw him step stiffly into the sleeper for the West, and, shrugging his shoulders, he turned away and went rapidly up the street. Walking toward Pelham Place, he reached the house in which Miss Gibbie was waiting, but he could not trust himself to go in. At the door he left a note, then walked down King Street and into the Calverton road.

For hours he walked. The moon, clear and serene, hung calmly above him, and in the sandy road shadows cast by the stripped branches of trees and shrubs swayed and danced, beckoned or stood still. The air was cold and stinging, and the silence, soft as the pale light of the meaningless moon, was unbroken save by the whispering of the wind. Presently at the top of a hill he sat down under a big bare tree and

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leaned his back against it. Far off in the distance the lights of Yorkburg twinkled like fireflies in the hazy darkness, and at his left a soft, luminous ball was gathering into shape and brilliance. With a roar it rushed through the outskirts of the little town before its long black tail of cars could be defined, and as its vibrations reached him John struck a match and took out his watch.

"The one-twelve," he said, "and fifteen minutes late." A cigar was lighted slowly, and a long, deep whiff taken. Watching its spirals of smoke curl lazily upward, his eyes narrowed and he nodded toward them.

"When the Lord made woman"—he was looking now at a light in a group of trees not very far away—"I wonder if He ever realized the trouble she could give a man!"

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XXVI

THE SURRENDER

SAVE the light from the shaded lamp on the library-table and the glow of the dancing flames on the hearth, the room was in shadow.

Mary Cary had drawn the curtains, straightened chairs and books, rearranged the flowers, refilled the inkstand on her open desk, brushed the bits of charred wood under the logs on the andirons, turned on every light, and then, seeing nothing else to do that would permit of movement, had taken her seat near the table.

John Maxwell, standing by the mantelpiece, watched her with eyes half amused, half impatient, but with no comment, and for some minutes neither had spoken. When she was seated, however, a magazine in her lap, he walked around the room and turned off all lights except that of the lamp; then came back and took the chair opposite hers.

"This is such an interesting number," she said, opening the magazine and shuffling its pages as if they were cards. "I suppose you have seen it?"

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"No. I haven't seen it." He leaned forward, his hands clasped between his knees, his eyes holding her steadily. "Don't you think, Mary, this foolishness between us has gone on long enough?"

"What foolishness?" She put the magazine on the table and tapped it with her fingers, looking away from him and into the leaping flames. "Has there been any foolishness between us? I didn't know it."

"What would you call it?"

"I wouldn't—" she took up her handkerchief and examined the initial on it with critical intentness—"I wouldn't call it anything. We are very good friends."

"Are we?"

"I've always thought so. If I'm mistaken—" She bit her lip nervously. "At least we used to be. But friendship is so insecure. That of years is killed in a moment and—"

"A thousand evidences forgotten if there be one imaginary failure, one seeming neglect. But I'm not speaking of friendship."

A step behind made him turn, and as Hedwig came in he got up and took the telegram she handed him with only half-concealed irritation. Mary Cary, too, stood up, and as Hedwig left the room the bit of yellow paper was handed her.

"So Mr. Bartlett is coming himself," she said, reading and handing the paper back. "That is much the best. I thought he was too busy. Does Miss Gibbie know?"

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"Not yet." The telegram was put in his pocket. "Whether she wants to or not, Miss Gibbie will have to let Yorkburg know who its friend is. I don't doubt she meant well. To do things as nobody else does them is to her irresistible. But how a woman of her sense and understanding of human nature could fail to see the complications of a situation in which secrecy and mystery were elemental parts is beyond my comprehension."

"But that's because you're a man." She nodded toward him with something of the old bantering air. She and I were just women, and women don't see clearly—like men. After mistakes are out on the table, even a woman can see them, but it takes a man to see them before they are made. Of course, it was a queer way of doing things, but it was her way. Everybody is queer."

"I don't deny it."

"And if she didn't want her left hand to know what the right was doing, why tell it? Everybody has a pet something they take literally in the Bible. Miss Gibbie likes the sixth chapter of Matthew. A great many people seem never to have read it."

"And a great many people who try to practically apply the teachings of their Master are called cranks and crazy. Until human nature is born again, human tongues will talk and human noses sniff and human ears listen for what is ugly and unkind. The partnership into which you and Miss Gibbie entered

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was all right in purpose and intent, but you forgot in your calculations the perversities of the people you were trying to help. People will pardon anything sooner than a secret."

"I suppose I will have to tell how Tree Hill was given me, and about the bonds and the fifty thousand dollars and the baths and the tired and sick people sent away. How do you suppose it can be told—in the way she will mind least, I mean?"

John, leaning against his end of the mantel, looked at the girl at hers, and laughed in her troubled eyes.

"The decision will hardly rest with us. Mr. Bartlett comes to-morrow to meet Mr. Moon and several other gentlemen invited for the purpose. The money deposited with his company to be used for Yorkburg in coming years will be staggering to Mr. Walstein. Miss Gibbie is a wizard in some things, and in business a genius, yet of this little scheme she made a mess and put you in a— How to let Yorkburg know who its unknown friend is will be settled by Mrs. McDougal, I imagine. I had a little talk with her this morning. She has understood all the time who was putting up the money, but she had sense enough to keep her understanding to herself. I told her she could let it out. She flew home for eggs, and there'll be few of her customers who won't have a visit from her to-day. You won't have to tell the name of Yorkburg's friend."

For a moment there was silence. Then abruptly

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he crossed over to her, took her hands in his, and held them with an intensity that hurt.

"Mary! Mary!" In his arms he gathered her, crushed her, lifted her face to his and kissed it, kissed her lips, her eyes, her hair. "We will come back for Christmas, but we are to be married at once."

She struggled to draw away, but his strong arms held her until breath came unsteadily; then, as again she tried to free herself, he held her off, gripping her hands.

"Is there nothing to tell me, Mary?"

"To tell you?" The long lashes shielding the awakened eyes quivered. He bent closer to hear her. "What do you want me to tell you?"

"That you—love me." His face whitened. "For my much love is there not even a little, Mary?"

She shook her head, her eyes still upon the rug. Then she looked up. "I never love—a little. For your much love I have— Oh, John, John, don't leave me any more! Don't leave me here alone!"

"I suppose"—she punched the cushion on the sofa beside her into first one shape and then another—"I suppose there must always be something we wish there wasn't. I don't like your world. I don't want to marry in it. It's so queer how things get mixed up and twisted in life. I believe in the old-fashioned things, and do not want that which the men and women of your world want. What would mere ex-

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ternals mean if your heart was not happy, or if one's life was spent on parade with no one to care for you—just for yourself."

"In this particular case"—he smiled in the brilliant, anxious eyes—"there is some one to care for you—just for yourself."

"I know, but—" She drew away. "I can't talk if— You really mustn't, John! I think I'd better sit in that chair."

"I think you hadn't. Go on. But what?"

"I don't like your kind of life. I mean the kind the people you know lead. When I used to visit Geraldine French I was always finding points of likeness in it to my early training. We had to do so many things we didn't want to, just because other people did them. Everything was cut according to a pattern. I don't like rules and regulations. I like Yorkburg. Here love counts."

"Love counts everywhere. Unfortunately, it's the rules and regulations that don't count in many worlds. Custom controls, I admit. But it's because love counts I need you, Mary. All of us get tired of it, the cap and bells, the sham and show, and underneath we know are eternal verities we pretend to forget. Eternal verities don't let you forget. Don't you see what you have done? You have made me understand what life could mean. In what you call my world are many who do not seem to know. There is something very terribly needing to be done there."

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"What is there needing to be done?"

"To marry for love— Oh, I don't mean there is no marrying for love." He laughed in the shocked, wide-opened eyes. "I mean there is nothing so deceptive as love's counterfeit, and other considerations masquerade under it unguessed, perhaps. Many men and women are, doubtless, honest in thinking when they marry that they love each other, but if they live long enough a large proportion find out their mistake."

"Oh no! I don't believe it! I know too many happy marriages to believe a thing like that. The trouble is—"

He looked in the protesting eyes. "The trouble is what?"

"That people imagine what they start with will last through life. As if love alone stood still, did not grow more or become less. I do not wonder at the unhappy marriages. I wonder there are not more of them."

"More of them? Were I to count the enviably happy couples I know there would barely be a dozen."

"A dozen?" She turned toward him in pretended unbelief. "In your world, do you know a dozen?"

"In your world, do you know more?"

"Many more."

"Could you name them? Not the outwardly, the seemingly happy ones, but those who are happier with each other under any circumstances than they

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would be apart under any conditions. Do you know many married people who come under this head?"

For a moment she did not answer, then turned to him questioning, troubled eyes. "Why do you ask such things, John? Our ideals of happiness may not be those of others. I know many happily married people. I've always believed in love, am always going to believe in it, and if unhappiness follows many marriages it is because there is not love enough. Happiness is such a tender thing!" She drew her hands away and clasped them tightly. "One should so carefully guard it, and instead—"

His eyes were missing no throb of the heart that sent recurring waves of color to her quivering face. "Instead?"

"It is taken as a right, rather than an award. And then there is weeping or storming or sneering when it is lost."

"Then we shall take it"—he lifted her hand to his lips—"as the award of life, and guard it. It needs guarding. In any world its hold is insecure."

Presently she again looked up and smoothed her hair. "But, John"—she shook her head doubtfully—"I shall be such a shock to your friends. I want, don't you see, to be free, to do what I want to do, not what I should by a code of custom. The Martha of me would break forth when most she should be quiet, and keep you always uneasy. I never know what Martha is going to say or do."

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"That's why I love Martha! It's so wearing to always know what a person is going to say and do. If you were just all Mary—" He laughed, measuring her hand against his and looking carefully at its third finger. "You'll be a joy, my Mary Martha, and the more shocks you give the better for us." He took out a note-book and opened it. "What day is this? Saturday—let me see. Thanksgiving is on the twenty-sixth. You will want to be here, I suppose?"

"I certainly will!" She sat suddenly upright.

"And you want to be back for Christmas?"

"I certainly do. What are you talking about?" Her face crimsoned. "You don't suppose I'm really going—"

"I don't suppose anything about it. The matter is no longer in your hands. Three weeks from to-day will be the second of December. That will give us time, say, for a bit of Bermuda and back here for the holidays. Mary Cary"—he took her hands in his—"three weeks from to-day you are to marry me."

"But Miss Gibbie! We can't leave her here by herself. Couldn't she go, too? She'd love Bermuda. Don't you think, John, she could go, too?"

"I think not!" John's nod was decisive. "I prefer taking this trip with just my wife."

Mary leaned back on the sofa as if swept by a sudden realization. "I don't know what we've been

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thinking about. To go away and leave Miss Gibbie like this would—"

"Make her indeed and in truth the friend of Yorkburg. To win its love she must give more than money. You have done much for her, opened her eyes to much, and she is beginning to understand. She has had a hard fight. To conquer herself, to give you up has meant—"

"Oh, John, John!" With a half-sob her hands went out to him. "For us the days ahead seem glad and beautiful. For her— To leave her, to leave my people, my little orphans, would be more than selfish. I can't, John, I can't!"

He bent over and gathered her close to his heart, laughed unsteadily in the face he lifted to his. "You have no choice, my dear. You are mine now. Forever mine!"

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XXVII

A TIE THAT BINDS

BEFORE the fire in Miss Gibbie's sitting-room Mrs. McDougal held up her left foot to the crackling coals and watched the steam curl away from the wet sole of her shoe with beaming satisfaction. Her skirt, wet around the hem, was drawn up to her knees, her coat, well sprinkled, was on the back of a chair, and in her lap her hat lay limp and spiritless.

From the once upright tail feathers of her haughtiest rooster which adorned one side of the hat, the breast of a duck adorning the other, tiny globules of water trickled slowly into the brim; and as she held it over the fender the feather yielded to circumstance and drooped dejectedly.

"Now, ain't that just like folks!" she said, holding it off and looking at it in high derision. "Look at that thing, Miss Gibbie, peart as the first crocus and proud as cuffy when the weather was good, and at the first touch of dampness or discouragement flop it goes, and no more spirit than a convict in court! It certainly is strange how many things in nature is like

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human beings. Now this here rooster and this here duck"—she smoothed the breast and ran her fingers down the feathers—"just naturally had no use for each other. If fowls could do what you call sniff, they sniffed, and when one took the right-hand side of the yard, the other took the left. And yet here is their remains, side by side, a decoratin' of my hat. It ain't only flowers of the field what flourish and are cut down, it's everything what stands up, specially hopes and desires, and things like that. The only thing in life we can be certain sure of is death, ain't it? But I never did feel any call to be cockin' my eye at death just because I knew it had to come. When it do come I hope there'll be grace given to meet it handsome, and go with it like I'm glad, but I ain't a-goin' to be sittin' on the doorstep lookin' out for it. I'm not hankerin' after heaven yet. There's a long time to stay there. Funny how many people is willin' to be separated from their loved ones, and how they put off joinin' of 'em as long as possible. I don't deny I'm fond of life. I just love to live!"

"Which you won't do long if you go out in weather like this. I've never seen such a storm in November. Are you sure your stockings aren't wet?"

Miss Gibbie, in her big chair on the opposite side of the fireplace, looked at Mrs. McDougal half irritably, half perplexedly. To walk from Milltown to Pelham Place in a heavy snow with no overshoes and no umbrella was just like her. She

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shouldn't have come, and yet Miss Gibbie was not sorry she had come. There were times when Mrs. McDougal's chatter was unendurable, but others when her philosophy of life had a common-sense value that systems of belief and articles of faith failed to supply. To-day was one of the latter times. She was rather glad to see her. Leaning forward, she repeated the question: "Are you sure your stockings are not wet?"

"Sure as I'm a sinner." Mrs. McDougal held up first one shoe and then the other. "Just the soles were wet, and their sizzlin' don't mean anything. They're an inch thick, them soles are. Them's McDougal's shoes." She held her feet out proudly. "I always did say, Miss Gibbie, if you couldn't have what you wanted in life, for the love of the Lord don't whine about it, but work it off and get a smile on! I'd a heap rather have a telephone in my house and just step up to it and call for one of them takin cabbys, like we saw at Atlantic City, and come a-scootin' and a-honkin' up to your door and step out superior and send up a card with Mrs. Joel B. McDougal on it than to put on two pairs of McDougal's socks first, and then pull away at his shoes and wrap my legs in newspapers to keep my skirts from slushin' of 'em. I'd a heap rather done that. But a lot of life ain't what we'd rather. It's what is. And my grandmother always told me there warn't nothin' in life what showed the stock you come from as the way

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you took what come to you. I never did have no use for a whimperer. Of course, I'm plain. Born Duke and married McDougal, but whenever I get in a fog and can't see clear, and so tired out I can't eat, and plum run down, I say to myself, 'Your folks ain't ever flunked yet, and you keep your head where the Lord put it.' He put it up. Folks see me laugh a lot. I do. I couldn't learn to play on the pianer, though I'm clean crazy about music. I couldn't learn none of the things I yearned for inside, so I said to myself, 'You learn to laugh, laugh hearty.' And somehow it's helped a lot, laughin' has. There's many a time I done it to keep tears back. Ain't nobody but has tears to shed some time or other. But 'tain't no use in keepin' a tank of 'em to be tapped at every slip up. When I get so I can't keep mine back any longer I goes to the woodhouse and locks the door and has it out. But that's just when I'm tired and there don't seem nothin' ahead. I tell the Lord about it. Tell Him there ain't nothin' human can help. Just Him. And if He don't, I'm done for. Ain't ever been a time yet that when I come right down to it and says, 'Lord, I need You,' that the help ain't handed out. I mean help to take hold again and keep on laughing. I don't ask for automobiles and a brick house and fur coats and plum-puddin's. Never did think the Lord was in that kind of supply business. But when I says, 'You and Me got to fight this thing out,' He ain't ever gone

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back on me yet. Yes'm, these here is McDougal's shoes. I was thankful enough they was in the house to put on. I always was lucky, though. But just listen at me a-runnin' on worse'n Mis' Buzzie Tate. And I ain't even answered your question as to what I come for. Maybe it's because I'm not sure how you'll take it."

Miss Gibbie leaned over and with the poker broke a large lump of coal, making it blaze and roar in licking, outleaping flames. "What is it? I'm not dangerous, I hope."

"No'm, you're not dangerous." Mrs. McDougal straightened her now dry skirt. "But you might think I was audacious, which is what I am, I reckon. I don't mean nothin' like that, and I ain't got no more use for familiarity than you have, but my grandmother always told me if you heard anything kind about a person 'twas your business to pass it on same as unkind things is passed. And I just want to tell you that the day I was takin' them eggs around, the day Mr. John told me in words what I'd long known without 'em, as to who Yorkburg's friend was, I heard so many downright gratitudes and appreciations along with the surprise and the raisin' up of hands and eyes that I wonder your ears didn't burn plum off. I ain't sayin' 'twas fulsome praise they chucked at you. It warn't. You ain't the kind what folks is free with. You can't help it, never havin' been thrown much with back-yards and ac-

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quainted chiefly with the parlor. But all that's wanted is the chance to love you. They know you're their friend. You've proved it by acts, instead of words, the usual way, and if'n you could see fit to sometimes pay a visit when Miss Mary goes away—"

She stopped. Miss Gibbie pushed her chair back farther in the shadow, and with her hand shaded her face. For a long moment there was silence, then Mrs. McDougal examined carefully the soles of her shoes, after which she took up her hat and smoothed the breast of the once sniffy duck.

"I ain't a-goin' to say anythin' about Miss Mary's leavin' Yorkburg," she said, presently, "except this—I had to go to the woodhouse about it and get plum down on my knees and own up I was cussin' mean and selfish not to be smilin' glad she and Mr. John were goin' to get married. They're young, Miss Gibbie, and it's nature for young folks to love each other and go hand in hand through life. Me and you both is thankful his hand is for her and hers is for him. But your heart can be thankful and ache, too. If you'll be excusin' of my seemin' free, I just wanted to tell you yours ain't the only one what's had a great big, heavy, lovin' somethin' on it right here"—she put her closed hand on her breast—"ever since we heard the news. And it's because of that lump we ain't ever goin' to let her know we're anything but joyful. We want that weddin' to be a regular bunch of bells. Christmas and Easter and marriage all in

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one. She do look sometimes as if it will break her heart to go away and leave all she loves so here, and particular you. She don't let me speak of it, but I told her it was the lot of woman to follow on, and, of course, if she'd let herself be beguiled into lovin' a man she'd have to yield up a heap for the pleasure of his company. Never did seem to me matrimony did much for women, anyhow. They have to give up their name and their home and their friends and their kinfolks and their wages, if they work for a livin', and take what's given 'em for the rest of their natural lives. No'm. I ain't never seen where marriage did much for women. I certainly would like to have had a beau, though. I never had a beau. I warn't but seventeen when McDougal asked me to marry him, and, not havin' a bit of sense, I said yes. That's all the courtin' there was. If ever I'm a widow I bet I have a beau. A woman does like to have some words said to her every now and then, even if she knows they ain't so."

She got up and, before the mirror over the mantel, pinned on her hat, getting it, as usual, on the side. Taking up her coat, she felt it to see that it was dry, and again nodded at the lady in the chair.

"I tell you customs is curious, Miss Gibbie, and, bein' man-made mostly, ain't altogether in favor of females. But neither is life. Life has got a lot in it what ain't apple-blossoms and cherry-pie. You think you've got things like you want 'em; you peg

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away for this and you beat around for that, and, just as you're gettin' ready to set down and enjoy yourself, up comes somethin' you warn't a lookin' for and knocks the stuffin' clean out of you. I found out a long time ago 'twas all foolishness, this waitin' to enjoy yourself, and I says to myself, says I, 'Look here, Bettie Francis Duke McDougal, if there's any little forget-me-nots along the road, you just pick 'em up and make a posy. Don't be waitin' for American Beauties to pull.' I never cared much for American Beauties, anyhow. I ain't ever had one, but a whole lot of things don't give pleasure after they're got. Well, good-bye, Miss Gibbie. I certainly have enjoyed seein' of you. I told somebody the other day that for sense and wisdom and the learnin' in books there warn't your match on earth. Just to hear you talk is an edjication, and I sure do enjoy myself whenever I see you. I hope you don't mind my comin' to-day?"

Miss Gibbie, who had risen, held out her hand. "No," she said. "I am glad you came. I may have to send for you pretty often this winter. You can help me — you and Peggy. Tell Peggy she must come and see me."

For an hour, two hours, Miss Gibbie sat before her fire, hands in her lap, eyes unseeing, bent upon the curling, darting flames. One by one days of the past year came before her, stopped or passed on ac-

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cording to their memories. The long talks with Mary of late repeated themselves, and she felt again the warm, young arms about her as she was told that which she knew so well. John's hands, too, seemed again to hold hers as he asked for the promised blessing, and when he bent and kissed her she had laughed lightly lest her heart give sign of its twisting, shivering hurt.

Suddenly her face fell forward in her hands. "So many lonely people in the world," she said, under her breath, "so many people in Lonely Land! Nobody to wait for when the day is done. Nobody to go to when darkness falls!"

After a while she got up and walked over to the window and stood beside it. The early twilight had become night, but the first snow of the season showed clearly in the unbroken whiteness of lawn and long, straight street and roofs of seeming marble. The burdened branches of crystal-coated trees swayed in the wind, and here and there, in the light cast from tall poles at long intervals apart, they gleamed in dazzling brilliance and flashing sheen. Past streets and houses on to open fields, her eyes, through the whirling, fast-falling snow, followed the Calverton road which led to Tree Hill, and in the darkness she saw the lights in the house twinkle faintly in the flake-filled air.

Drawing the curtains farther aside, she stood close to the window and pressed her face upon it. Behind

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the house and below the apple orchard at a snow-covered mound she was now in spirit, and under her breath she made effort to speak bravely.

"A lonely old woman, Colleen. A lonely old woman, but the old must not get in the way of the young. Your eyes have been upon me. You've made me remember youth comes but once, and life—is love."

The opening of the door made her turn quickly. Snow-covered, faces flushed with the sting of biting wind, vivid and full of glow, they stood before her—Mary and John.

"I had to see you." Unfastening the fur coat, Mary handed it to John, then threw her arms around Miss Gibbie. "Are you sure you are perfectly well? This morning you seemed to have a little cold, and I couldn't—"

"—Rest until she saw for herself how you were to-night." John put the coat on the chair. "I told her I'd come and see you, but that wouldn't do."

"Of course it wouldn't!" Again the face held between her hands was searched anxiously, and her eyes lighted with glad relief. "I was so worried. I'm never going to let anybody see for me how you are. I'm going to always see for myself!"

THE END

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